NOVEL
7
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LONER LIFE
IN ANOTHER WORLD

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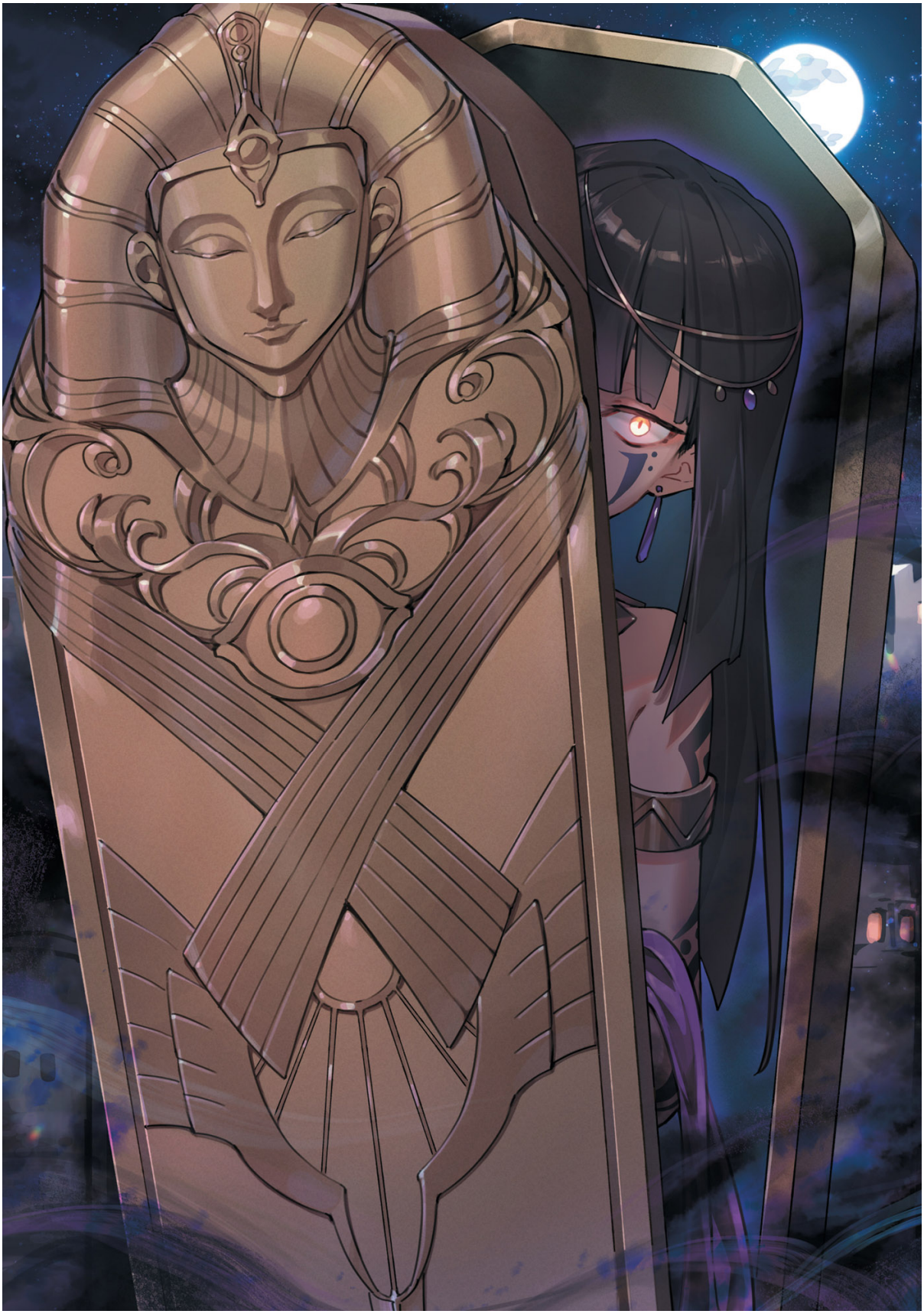

ANGELICA
CLASS REP
SLIME EMPEROR
HARUKA
SHALLICERES
NEFERTIRI
MEROPAPA
To think this is the will of God! If it was God's will for monsters to attack innocent, happy people, then I rejected it! Unforgivable!

"You better not look!"
CERES
MERIELLE
"Very well. I accept!"

LONER LIFE
IN ANOTHER WORLD

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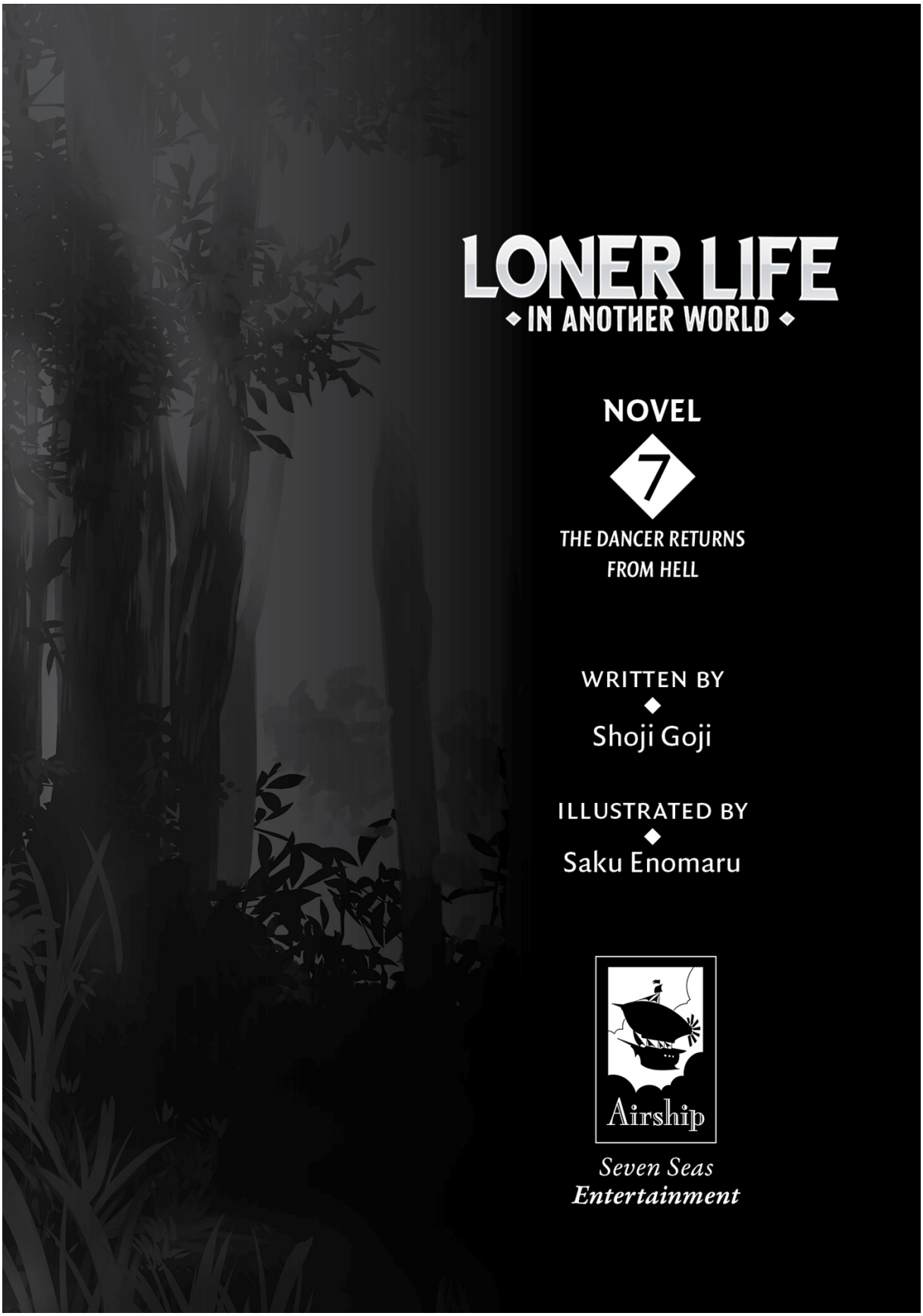


LONER LIFE
IN ANOTHER WORLD

NOVEL

7

THE DANCER RETURNS FROM HELL

WRITTEN BY

Shoji Goji

ILLUSTRATED BY

Saku Enomaru

Airship

Seven Seas
Entertainment

CHARACTERS

QUEEN BEE

One of Haruka's classmates. Leader of a group of five fashion-obsessed girls. A former model.

BOOK CLUB PRESIDENT

One of Haruka's classmates. A level-headed strategist who was involved with literary activities back in school. Has known Haruka since elementary.

SHIELD GIRL

One of Haruka's classmates. A serious girl who protects everyone with her massive shield. Tends to get knocked around a lot from taking so many hits.

FISH GIRL

One of Haruka's classmates. After getting chased around by guys in the fantasy world, deeply distrusts men...besides Haruka.

SHALLICERES

The princess of the Kingdom of Diorelle. Traumatized by experiencing the half-naked heave-ho of the pseudo-dungeon. Also known as the Royal Girl and Shillyshally.

CERES

Princess Shalliceres's maid. Has served as the princess's guard and body double from a young age.

SLIME EMPEROR

A former dungeon boss. Absorbs enemy skills with Predation. Haruka used "Servitude" on it.

ERAILIA

An elf. Vizmuregzero's sister. She recovered from a terrible illness with one of the frontier's mushrooms.

VIZMUREGZERO

An elf. Erailia's older brother. A Magic Swordfighter and one of the Merchant Kingdom's Seven Swords. Currently serving as a royal guard in the capital.

STALKER GIRL

The daughter of the chief of the Shino clan, a family specializing in reconnaissance. A top-class spy with Perfect Invisibility.

MEROPAPA

The Duke of Omui. An invincible warrior hero known as the Frontier King and War God, among other titles.

MERIELLE

The daughter of the Duke of Omui. Unable to remember her name, Haruka calls her Merimeri, and now so does everyone else.

CLASS REP

The student council president of Haruka's class. Talented leader. Has known Haruka since elementary school.

HARUKA

A high school student summoned to another world. The only member of his class not to receive a cheat skill from God.

ANGELICA

The former emperor of the Ultimate Dungeon. Haruka used "Servitude" on her. Also known as Miss Armor Rep.

VICE REP A

One of Haruka's classmates. A cool beauty prone to glaring at the guys when they do something stupid.

VICE REP B

One of Haruka's classmates. An absentminded girl who was voted most popular student in the class. An Archsage.

VICE REP C

One of Haruka's classmates. A lively ankle-biter who longs to grow up into an adult. She's like a class mascot.

STORY

The two eldest princes threw Diorelle into chaos. The first prince allied with the Theocracy to invade the frontier, leading the charge of the Frontier Reclamation Army. Then there was the second prince, who plotted a rebellion with the Merchant Kingdom—and Haruka dealt with both of them.

Haruka launched the Souvenir Shop Capital-Front and Orphanage Branches in Diorelle. His real motive was to eliminate the Merchant Kingdom, who were the power behind the second prince's schemes. He waged economic war with the merchants, who had planned to flood the deprived capital's economy with their own merchandise for sky-high profits. Haruka even crushed the Merchant Kingdom's trump card—the continent's most wondrous Magic Swordfighter, Vizmuregzero, who was only dispatched once they realized Haruka's true ability. Meanwhile, the boy groups led by Oda and Kakizaki succeeded in disrupting the merchants' distribution chain, and the Merchant Kingdom was forced out of Diorelle.

The Frontier Reclamation Army remains. Haruka rushed back to the domain, but can he take on an army of tens of thousands all by himself?!

PROLOGUE

◆

A GLITTERING, GOLDEN MAGIC BLADE held in a perfect pose remained frozen, fossilized in amber within the coffin. It was a masterful beeswax statue of a gorgeous woman. The most dangerous thing here was that magic sword—it was the same blade that the undying Ultimate Dungeon mummies had, equipped with the fatal skill Underworld.

"Underworld aside, the most dangerous thing is this lovely lady's bedazzling bod! Is that a never-ending old-dude spawning of endless old-dude-smell revival I sense?!"

The corpse started to writhe. Every impaled knight in armor simultaneously stirred. Yup, those were old dudes in there! I couldn't waste any more time ogling a hot bod!

This one move, Underworld, surpassed all others. A single person was more powerful than the endless stench of bothersome old dudes. This chick and her coffin were dangerous. I had to stop them. I had no idea if it was even possible.

"It's gonna be a castle jam-packed and overflowing with old-dude density! The old-dude ratio easily tops 400 percent! Old dudes on top of old dudes?!"

This world was cruel. Horrible. I knew that. I mean, there was the occasional hot chick, but endless old dudes? *Aren't there supposed to be more babes in fantasy worlds?!*

"There's no use in longing for something else," I sighed. "That's a different kind of fantasy."

This was the strongest ace up their sleeve—an ace that signaled an unlimited hell of old dudes. And then there was the beautiful girl in the coffin, whom even Jupiter Eye couldn't see. Only old dudes. Always, old dudes. This world was full of never-ending old dudes, and now it was reviving more of them on top of it. The endless army of armed corpses

charging at me—all old dudes. Enough severed bodies—more sexy bodies, please?!

"I bought time, shaved down their numbers, only to run into the unstoppable royal flush of unlimited undead… Which means that that hot chick is the Theocracy's Joker card. Ugh, I got bested by a sexy woman. Again?"

Yeah, I was stuck. Even if she was their Joker, I'd rather take her over these old dudes!

"There is literally no exchange rate between a babe and old dudes, and adding more old dudes certainly doesn't make up for the imbalance! The more there are, the more value they lose. I only value babes in my calculus!"

All the armor was clanking like thunder, reverberating throughout the castle and filling it with old dude stench. I was surrounded by 30,000 undead old dudes in this castle. *I think Murimuri Castle's structure might be compromised… I'm pretty sure the old dude stink has sunk into the walls!*

DAY 69

NIGHT

I just want to hug and sing and dance, but I only have old dudes to do it with!

SOUVENIR SHOP

ORPHANAGE BRANCH

FEVERISH SHOUTS of joy echoed through the capital. The city had been freed, the civil conflict had ended, and the queen accompanied the revived king. At the sight of their queen, the populace erupted into fresh cheers. It was a triumphant finale, with even the duke of the frontier coming to take a bow.

"Smile, Terisel," he said. "This is the duty that now falls to us—show them a smile like your life depends on it."

"Yes, Lord Meropapa."

The capital was reborn, and not a drop of blood spilled. Just beyond this triumphant scene, the guards arrested the nobility who had conspired with the Merchant Kingdom. Diorelle had considerably fewer weaknesses for foreign countries to exploit. The influence that had been working its way into the nation for many years had been torn out, root and branch.

Diorelle was saved. A celebration was only fitting; this was a great achievement, one fit for history books and songs of legends. Yes, the Kingdom and capital were saved…but at the sacrifice of the frontier. The boy now travelled there to offer himself as the sole and tragic sacrifice.

***

"Everything's okay now."

"Yes. Not even the nobles have the resources to revolt now."

“Thank you so much.”

“It’s not over yet.”

“Yes, we can’t afford to lose the frontier,” said Duke Omui. “That’s why Haruka-kun went back.”

Cheers and applause served as our denouement. It took a long time before we could have a proper conference with Duke Omui and his party, but at last we concluded our meeting. We confirmed the obvious: the capital was saved.

“How are the preparations?”

“Complete, my lord.”

Not a drop of civilian blood spilled. No one starved. Peace had returned to the capital. The remaining Merchant Kingdom nobles and subordinates were powerless to interfere. Everything had concluded exactly as Haruka-kun planned.

“I had forgotten how populated the capital is,” commented Lord Meropapa.

“Indeed,” Terisel-san said. “Thank you, thank you again.”

People dancing and drinking from jugs of mead provided by the king while whooping in joy. The dire atmosphere in the capital had been transformed, and it was now flooded with smiling faces and celebration. The people who had given up hope revealed their true faces: a city of joyful people hugging one another in the streets.

“It all went smoothly, didn’t it?”

“And that food looked so good!”

They hadn’t even had to pay for their joy with conflict. No violence, no chaos—the mood went straight to laughter. So, the souvenir shop launched a grand bargain sale, precipitating a furious stampede of wives through the city gates.

The military police and personal guard of the nobles had attempted to storm the souvenir shop, and for their trouble they had been sent to “old dude hell” by Haruka-kun. There was no guard to stand in the way of a stampede of ten thousand housewives.

Haruka-kun casually flicked off those mercenaries who obeyed the nobles to keep bloodshed at bay. Now those fortress city gates were smashed to splinters. Invited by the scent of soy-broiled eel, men and women of all ages rushed through the city gates. Our own mouths salivated at the scent. Everyone gobbled up the food. The flavor was wonderful, and all the girls were ridiculously busy with sales!

"That eel was the finishing blow, right?" I called.

Somehow Haruka-kun got his hands on eel and red sake.

"You can't fight against that!" agreed Vice Rep A.

"No kidding."

That was the real moment the capital fell. It was soy-broiled eel, for heaven's sake!

"It's not just the housewives—everyone's here!"

Everyone's fires had been stoked—we'd used a bit of wind magic to spread the smell of eel across the entire city. *That'll do the trick, right?* I mean, it smelled incredible. It smelled so good that the only possible defense would have been a stuffy nose!

That's why it was all just a show. Everything was guaranteed to go like this from the start. A strategy so inevitable that we set the tables long ago. It was the finishing blow set up by Haruka-kun. Book Club President easily spread the scent and caused this agitation with her "Ripple Necklace: Resistance, Intelligence +50% up. Anti-resistance. Effect spread and permeation."

We should've braced for the chaos these kinds of effects would sow. If we could control the mobs with the mass psychology of broiled eel and ripple magic, the capital would've fallen long ago. Haruka-kun just had to wait for the right moment to unleash this final blow—but now he was going by himself? *Broiled eel was supposed to be the finisher!*

"The hardest part is resisting eating it with your hands!"

"It's the toughest battle we've faced here!"

It only made sense that the capital had fallen. All we had to do was wait for the final staged scene. When the Imperial Guard and the Frontier Army marched in through the gates with their flags raised, they entered the

castle to the shouts and cheers of the civilians. The impregnable iron wall of the Diorelle capital fell without a fight.

"It's so unsatisfying, though."

"The fiercest soldier here is the eel!"

The capital was known as an impregnable fortress in all the old tales and legends. Diorelle possessed the Ultimate Lock: an impenetrable seal from the outside. On top of that, they were guarded by the capital's Eternal Trap. Haruka-kun nullified all of it. He hadn't even let them have their moment to shine.

"He straight-up filched the Eternal Trap, didn't he?"

"You betcha!"

After that, the final scene: the revival of the king, and the swift subjugation of all the nobles who'd sided with the Merchant Kingdom and the Theocracy. The corrupt lords were taken into custody, powerless to even fight back. They even lost their Merchant Kingdom and Theocracy secret escape routes.

"What a relief."

"And it turned out to truly be poison after all," said Terisel-san. "I can't thank you enough."

It turned out the King had been poisoned. An ancestral treasure managed to keep him alive, but the volume of poison had crossed fatal levels. The frontier's famed Mushroom Evangelist healed him with a high-class mushroom he'd prepared. As a precaution, he handed over a large load of healing mushrooms to Duke Omui. The duke had gripped Haruka-kun's hand, tears pouring down his face as he thanked him again and again. Haruka-kun didn't look like he appreciated the duke holding his hand like that one bit.

"It's time for us to go now, so be careful," I said.

"You too," Terisel-san responded. "Stay safe."

With the grandiose processions of the Imperial Guard and the frontier's army streaming into the castle, the nobles were out of tricks to pull. We heard that even the second prince had been taken into custody.

“Let’s go,” I said to our class.

“Yeah!”

The king returned; the capital was saved. That was the end of the play. Applause swept over the whole capital, which was so full of singing and shouting civilians that I wondered where all these people had been hiding. Everyone rejoiced over this new peace. The capital was safe now. It was time for us to go.

“Take care of things while we’re gone,” I said to the orphans. “Be good boys and girls, okay?”

“We’ll come back as soon as we can,” said Vice Rep A.

“We’ll be good! Come back soon!” the orphans shouted.

Vizmuregzero-san was handling the castle guard. Haruka-kun gave him top-class equipment, with *Donna Donna* written all over it. As in the song about the calf led to the slaughter? Poor guy.

His sister, Erailia-san, was getting along well with the kids, and agreed to look after them while we were away. She was an elf shrine maiden and a magic-wielder. She gave off the aura of a powerful fighter, so I felt reassured that they’d be safe with her.

The royal family also dispatched a guard for the souvenir shop. The souvenir shop was the savior of the capital, so they had prepared an especially gaudy defense force. We didn’t have to worry—the orphans were safe. It was time to go. Time to find the most dangerous person in the kingdom so we could fight by his side.

“Ready?”

“Yeah!”

Angelica-san went ahead of us to the frontier. She was faster than the rest of us anyhow. We wanted someone to get to Haruka-kun as soon as possible. She was so impatient she could hardly wait, so we just had her charge ahead of us.

Even if Haruka-kun wasn’t on his game, he might already be at the pseudo-dungeon by now. Since he was by himself, he might’ve decided to fly too. *Right, I almost forgot he could do that.* I didn’t know how he could fly without having discovered a landing method yet, but flying for him was

absurdly fast—as in, he'd crash into wherever he was going in no time. For some reason he was proud of that, but after, he'd whine at length to us about how badly it hurt.

"We need to be ready for action," I called. "Does everyone have all their equipment on?"

"Yeah, we're ready."

Everyone was anxious to get going. Haruka-kun was fighting by himself, waiting for us in the frontier. All alone. No wonder everyone was distracted.

"Departure time. The vanguard will be the gymnastics squad."

"Yaaah!"

"Bye-bye!" shouted the orphans. "Tell our big bro we miss him!"

The orphans were holding hands. They were dressed to the nines in the lovely hand-(tentacle-)made clothes given to them by Haruka-kun: adorable frilly dresses and prim boys' suits. We waved at them and smiled.

"Be back soon!"

Just as Haruka-kun requested, everything ended in a roaring, celebratory festival without injuries, deaths, disaster, or violence.

It was time to head out. Haruka-kun was out there. We had asked Haruka-kun to save the orphans, but at the time…Haruka-kun went a little overboard. In his excitement, he'd built the palatial orphanage and transformed the slum quarter. Then again, he probably would have done it even if we hadn't asked. What excuse would he have come up with if we hadn't? Still, that day, he'd made a miscalculation. Now we had children to protect and resources we needed to devote to that end. The Merchant Kingdom's shipments had been cut off because Oda-kun's group launched an invasion deep into enemy territory. Haruka-kun sounded pleasantly surprised when he heard that Oda-kun and his friends were properly upset, and that they had decided to fight of their own accord. Still…that meant that they wouldn't be back for some time. That was Haruka-kun's second mistake.

Haruka-kun was recklessly trying to protect everyone and everything all by himself, fighting no matter how dangerous, risky, or insane. It was

our turn to protect him! We could leave everything else in this world to him, but we definitely couldn't leave his own safety to him. We knew that if Haruka-kun ran out of options, he would use his own life to achieve what he wanted. That he would protect others, even if it meant losing his own life.

So in our nightly meetings, we unanimously agreed that even if it cost us everything else we'd worked for, we had to protect him. Everyone worked every day to level up, to practice, to obtain new equipment, all to fight for Haruka-kun's sake. We agreed on that in our meetings.

"Vanguard shift tiiiime!" chirped Vice Rep B. "Nothing unusual spotted, no signs of enemies, nothin'!"

"Got it. Servitude squad, you're up next," I said, "but don't go too far ahead."

"We know, we'll do the same thing as usual," said Shimazaki-san.

"Don't get too tired. Haruka-kun said we have to be perfect."

"Got it!"

We had to reduce the risk to him as much as possible, even if we couldn't be by his side. That might mean using a decoy to split the enemy forces, but we had to use any means necessary. Diversion tactics, simple support—anything. We all wanted to help him, no matter how small the task, so he wouldn't have to shoulder this all by himself.

War was dangerous for Haruka-kun. He had no shortage of problems, starting with his level and his HP, but that was all right. What was worse was his resolve to sacrifice his life if need be. Just like that time before. I couldn't bear to send him to face his death alone again!

Haruka-kun would march right to his own demise if we let him, so we had to prevent him from being put in that position. We could become his tools instead. Ruthless, cheating, crushing, deceiving tools. We were all happy to make that sacrifice. That was enough for us. We couldn't allow him to die on his own. That was what we decided in our meeting—anything it took.

"Do you think keeping up this speed until morning will get us there?"

"The arts club can pick up the pace if you want."

“Well, he did tell us to take our time, and he hasn’t summoned us yet, so let’s prioritize safety as we go,” I said.

“He’s taking on an army of 30,000 by himself and he tells us to take our time?”

“Well, he knows that we might get reckless if he makes us worry.”

Outriders, communications, frontlines, decoys—anything. So long as we could become pawns he could deploy. Given that he was taking on an army of thirty thousand alone, it was safe to assume he was already using tactics beyond what we could imagine. Maybe we wouldn’t even be able to spearhead his offensive. Even in that case, we could serve as backup at the very least.

If we’re not there, we can’t do anything at all. If there was anything we could do, that was enough. What mattered was that Haruka-kun didn’t have to do it all alone. That was the one thing we’d discussed in our girls’ meetings nonstop since coming to this world—to stick with him. *I won’t let him face death alone! Never again!*

“At least Angelica-san is ahead of us…but even so, there’s, like, no way we’re gonna get there by morning, y’know?”

“Do you think he’s already engaged the enemy?”

“The army should be at the gates of the pseudo-dungeon by now… It’ll depend on where he wants to engage them.”

We sped up, throwing ourselves into getting there without any plans for what we’d do when we arrived. He hadn’t called us yet, and we hadn’t received word from Stalker Girl’s clan. But the closer we got, the more we were in a position to help. All the girls worked hard to speed up our pace.

This was the same road we took when we hurried after Haruka-kun to the capital. When we got there, he’d already started a souvenir shop. Now we were taking the reverse course. *Yeah, I’m pretty concerned about what he might have started by the time we get there…*

“What do you think he’s plotting against an army of that size?”

“Don’t even think about it!” I shouted. “Anyone who manages to guess has definitively lost their mind.”

“Good point!”

I wasn't sure what Haruka-kun was so worried about, although I could tell from his face it was bad. We all wanted to get there before whatever he was so afraid of, so we hurried on. We were used to it—eating beef bento boxes while running at high speeds, I mean.

"Delicious! But why is he giving us beef again?"

"Who knows?"

We had a lot of girl problems, so devouring bento boxes at full speed without checking the contents hardly counted as a hardship.

"Oh, he added a side of miso soup. I shouldn't be surprised."

"His miso soup is the best!"

Still, there had to be something kind of odd about high school girls who could shovel beef on rice into their mouths and slurp up miso soup while sprinting at high speeds. If Haruka-kun had added a side of pickles, our humanity—our very teenage girlhood!—might have gotten called into question.

"Let's hurry up so we can get more delicious meals!" came a cheer.

"Let's gooo!"

Huh? Was that what this was really about? Delicious meals? *Ooh, will he have manju ready?*

DAY 69

NIGHT

These fantasy world folks ignore my joshing, so why are they jostling me?

CITY NEAR THE PSEUDO-DUNGEON SOUVENIR SHOP

THE CHURCH-ALIGNED noble army was organized in small groups. To my disgust and horror, the old dudes numbered over 30,000. A sea of ugly old dudes, as far as the eye could see! This was the last place in the world I wanted to go. *Fate is so cruel.*

"I wonder if this is really gonna work," I sighed.

I had never witnessed in my life such a terrifying, hideous, disgusting spectacle. I mean, a literal city of 30,000 people with a 100 percent old dude population—how could anywhere be worse?!

"I guess I gotta test it out. If it doesn't work, I'll return it or exchange it and get my money back? Thing is, I won't know until time's up. It's gonna stop working when the light stops hitting the rocks and it goes pitch-black, so time limit equals magic limit too? If the stone golems move a little, it's all money back in the bank. They'll start moving once I whack 'em a bit, so who's to say? But with all these (old dude) customers, I can throw in a mushroom pennant for every hundred products sold! I've got plenty of 'em left, after all. Why didn't they like these? Everything else sold out! Ya know what I mean?"

I managed to make it to the Pseudo-Dungeon Branch of the Souvenir Shop in time for our opening hours. *That was close. If I hadn't used Airwalk I probably wouldn't have made it in time. Oww, my back hurts!*

"Ugh, I'm really gonna need a better freebie next time…"

Seriously, though, when was I gonna get a landing skill? I should've gotten that first!

“If they order food, I’m gonna need to get shipments in…should’ve ordered in advance, jerks. I can get shipments at half-price, so selling the goods at 60 percent of cost will be a pretty great value. That extra 10 percent is just a broker’s charge, ya know? If you do the math, it’ll cause all sorts of perplexing theorems and puzzles, so don’t overthink it, all right? The shipments will come!”

The city was completely deserted—no people, no shops. What was it called? The neighboring city? Anyway, there were no shops nearby, so I had the monopoly rip-off opportunity of a lifetime. I had just made huge profits from the Merchant Kingdom, so if I didn’t rip off the Theocracy as well, that would be a clear-cut case of discrimination.

“We’ll pay,” the army officer told me. “Our troops that handled our supplies lost their load, so we’d been getting uneasy. Just get those shipments in.”

Yup, the noble army was running low on food…’cause on my way back from the capital, I just swung by and picked up the food from their suppliers. All of it. They didn’t have any.

“Thanks for your business…? But if you don’t pay up front, I won’t be able to get more shipments in. Please make your payment first. Our shipments manager will be making the trip—I’m just in charge of sales here—and while you’re here, would you like a major discount on my fabulous mushroom pennants?”

Yup, sell the stuff, swipe it back, stock it, and sell it again. Pretty good perpetual stocking plan, huh?

“Thank goodness we found this shop. Our supplies were in a critical status.”

“And those ‘manju’ things are damn delicious.”

“If these wooden passports really do stop stone golems from moving, we’ll even be able to limit casualties to a minimum.”

“They’re not cheap, but I suppose that’s where the value is.”

That’s right, suckers!

They were probably pretending to establish a friendly rapport with me. I bet they figured that if they could overcome the pseudo-dungeon, then

they could just kill me and take back their money later.

I charged them an extremely fair price for a lot of goods. I earned some solid stacks, but now I was almost sold out of manju. If the girls found out these old dudes ate them all, I'd suffer a torturous lecture under the lash of Class Rep! Why did Class Rep always have manju in both hands every time I saw her, anyway? She was constantly munching on them. I wondered if her calorie consumption was in the right stratosphere.

The noble army opened up a map on a newly purchased table to begin their strategy conference. It went without saying that I also charged an additional chair-use fee. I even offered a service of manju and tea for a small extra-additional surcharge! *I'm rich again!*

"That dungeon is a real problem."

"We can't advance at all with those golems."

"And we can never have enough of those passes. Prioritize obtaining more cash from our supply line!"

Their only strategy, if you could call it one, was human wave tactics. Using their Earth-magic battalion and engineering battalion, they tested the traps one at a time. The Earth-magic battalion created mud golems which triggered the traps and got taken out one after the next. It was an effective strategy in the long run to gradually nullify the pseudo-dungeon altogether.

"We don't have enough mages."

"Get the troops to help make golems. Hurry."

"What a pain."

The mud golems couldn't combat the stone golems, however, so they had to buy a boatload of passes from me to halt the stone golems' counterattacks. The rafflesia was waiting for them in the back, but with the target being old dudes, that rafflesia held off to preserve my innocence. Old dudes in a tentacle hell would be a literal hell for me! I didn't want to see that. Totally off limits for any teenage boy!

"What happened with the sixth division?"

"We should prioritize the right passageways."

"Ah, if we build a bridge, we should be able to pass!"

“All right, gather the troops.”

Their strategy called for a mass unit of troops to advance slowly as the magic battalions slowly cleared the traps with the mud golems. Endless traps awaited them—seriously, I was making more at this very moment. I was straight-up overhearing their strategy! It was no wonder I could counter it. No matter how many traps they cleared or bridges they constructed, so long as I could hear where they were going, I could make sure they had additional traps waiting for them. It was just too easy.

“So, shall we pass at this point?”

“Yes.”

I mean, those old dudes kept pointing at exact locations on the map and being like *let’s go here* and *this is the spot, got it* and *here, here!* If they were gonna give me that level of detail, of course I’d have no problem blocking them off with more traps.

“The cliff passage collapsed immediately after crossing the bridge.”

“There were no casualties, but we lost more supplies.”

“Again?!”

They yammered on and on with their geezer conference right where I could hear them. Ugh, I was overworked from keeping one step ahead of them. Rip-off tea and manju sets priced at 10,000 ele each kept flying off the shelves. *You guys realize you’re gonna gain weight from those?*

“Send in reinforcements, we need to clear those traps!”

“Use spellstones if necessary—just hurry!”

They truly believed they were making progress. They had absolutely no clue the pseudo-dungeon was steadily expanding.

One unit participated in the strategy meeting, remaining silent the whole time but keeping meticulous notes. That was the Theocracy’s unit. The nobles didn’t even realize that they were being used by the church as a pawn to defeat the pseudo-dungeon. I didn’t know if that was because they thought the Theocracy was being honest, if they just followed the church’s doctrine, or if they believed in that old god dude or whatever. If you still believed in that crap after reading some history book, you’d also believe

that those nerds had a wholesome future, or that the meatheads would learn human speech. How gullible could you get?

“That’s it. Fill the swamp on the left passage and construct a bridge.”

“I’m granting permission to use spellstones if the troops run low on magic.”

“Engineering battalion, pick up the pace! What are they doing?!”

“Souvenir kid! Bring us more tea.”

The magic battalions had used up their MP reservoirs, so they started consuming the church’s abundant spellstones to build more mud golems, which in turn created a path through the traps. Meanwhile, my frontier passes were flying off the shelves to keep the stone golems at bay. I felt bad that the stone golems had to pretend like they couldn’t move, but hey, all that daruma-doll tumbling practice I forced them to do turned out to have some use. They’d gotten pretty good at acting!

“The swamp on the third passageway has been completely filled, but there’s a three-prong forked passageway next.”

“Again? Send in the scouts.”

This lovely charade caused my piles of ele to fatten more and more. The rear guard bringing in the spellstones and cash belonged to the Theocracy. They planned to overcome the pseudo-dungeon’s traps, invade Murimuri Castle, exhaust the noble army’s equipment, and then dispose of them. Honestly, not a bad plan.

“Draw up a new map once they report back.”

“Another?”

“The eighth passage was a dead end. We’re still investigating the others.”

“Too slow! Have them pick up the pace!”

I was forcing them to expend enormous resources by pouring people, capital, and spellstones into burying the traps. All these resources landed neatly in my lap—and I’d use those resources to bury them. Yeah, this was going great.

“Again?!”

“Yes, the paths branched again.”

“They just keep dividing!”

Yeah, they were, because I was installing them. I dragged them deeper into the dungeon and profited the further they fell. The noble army was at a complete halt. If I attacked them directly, then the Theocracy might pull out its trump card. It was too soon for that, so I went for the mega-sale strategy feat. major moola!

Even if the noble army had brought beautiful lady knights with them, that just meant it would be the rafflesia’s time to shine. Alas, no beautiful lady knights. Rafflesia and I suffered together.

“Whichever path is guarded by the biggest traps is obviously right! Which ones were bigger?”

Well, the correct choice was the left one, which looked utterly bereft of traps—but its slope was slick with oil. Good luck running up *that* hill.

“There’s a giant hole in the middle of the center option.”

“Gather soldiers for that one and advance.”

They chose middle. Okay! I’d just make a big tunnel to connect that one back to the exit. It was so easy to adapt to their strategies when I was standing right next to them. Glad I was around such communicative old dudes.

The Theocracy representatives made a copy of the map and handed it off to their subordinates. I could assume that the knights of the church were waiting outside the pseudo-dungeon. Their endless parade of carriages carted in more money to buy food and dungeon passes. They had this much cash? They seriously could’ve just bought spellstones from the frontier to begin with! Idiots. I profited from it ultimately, so I couldn’t complain!

“Kid, sell us more equipment.”

“Two regiments had their equipment melted. This is one frustrating dungeon.”

Even though food, equipment, and dungeon passes flew off the shelves, the mushrooms pennants remained! Maybe I needed to come up with a product that stood out a bit more. Class Rep and the girls had tried to

put every last mushroom pennant into deep storage, but I couldn't figure out why.

"The next shipment has arrived."

The old dudes from Stalker Girl's clan arrived, pretending to be hauling in the next load of food and equipment.

"I figured I shouldn't bring in any of the women to such a sausage fest, but now that I think of it, increasing the old dude population here any further just might reach a fusing point and create one titanic old dude… Oh! Maybe that giant I fought was created by old dude fusion!"

I could just kill it, but whatevs. Even a regular giant was just one big old dude. One of my old-dude allies whispered to me, "No change," as they finished pretending to process the shipments and retreated. We somehow managed to avert old dude fusion. *Whew, that was a close one.*

"So they haven't made a move yet? I guess I'll just keep dragging this out and ripping them off. At least it's profitable."

As they started to fill the giant pitfall, I made it deeper and deeper. Still, the noble army had managed to advance through about 40 percent of the dungeon. I had to let them advance somewhat to keep them invested, although it pained me to see how happy it made the old dudes.

"We finally made it through!"

"This dungeon is ridiculous!"

Since it frustrated them, I made sure to connect the passageways into one another. If the noble army couldn't advance, then neither could the church army. That was an outcome I needed to nip in the bud. If they used *that* against the kingdom, then we'd be in for it. This had to be the final stand—between the kingdom and the frontier, at the pseudo-dungeon and Murimuri Castle.

At some point, they would go to their last resort. If I stopped it but things still got out of control, I could start the whacking. If I couldn't whack hard enough, then the pseudo-dungeon and Murimuri Castle would serve as my last resort. So here I was, fighting with my back against the wall, stalling them and stretching them thin with my souvenir shop powers.

"Souvenir kid, add an order for food for 5,000 people."

“And don’t forget the water.”

Reinforcements? They added mercenaries and bandits and thieves, just a mass of old dudes surpassing the physical limits of old-dude saturation. The old-dude stench alone was enough to defeat the pseudo-dungeon at this point! Any dog-type dungeons with sensitive noses would be whimpering by now—even I wanted to make a getaway!

“It turns out the only way to advance is through the left flank.”

“Come on! Climb, and bring more rope!”

They finally settled on the correct path, and had started to make their way up the oil-slicked incline. The oil had Dissolve imbued into it, so at least I’d sell some shoes too. *Better start up the mass-production techniques.* If the old dudes fell over, they’d lose a lot more equipment than that, so sales were only going to get better and better from here.

“Oh woe is me, surrounded by old dudes hither and thither! Night has fallen, but my only scenery is that of the pits of hell! My only option is fancy-pants literary exclamations, so I figured I’d give them a try, perchance.”

Everyone else in the world seemed to think that the old prince dude was useless, but he was actually the best old dude in this entire world—he’d actually had an escort of sexy female knights! Meanwhile, the noble and church armies were worthless. The church should have sexy clerics, and you’d think they could’ve rustled up some sexy treasure-hunting mercenaries to join the army. Then at least the rafflesia would have some ladies to entertain. But alas! Old dudes only!

The only person to successfully make it through the dungeon had been a princess. Know what that meant? The more old dudes there were, the less safe the dungeon got. And the percentage of old-dudes right now was a perfect 100.

DAY 70

MORNING

Self-delaying tactics with bonus information-leaking functionality is granting me some pretty prosperous profits.

SOUVENIR SHOP OFFICE

CITY NEAR THE PSEUDO-DUNGEON SOUVENIR SHOP

I HAD THE WORST POSSIBLE fantasy-world summoning ever! Miserable day after miserable day…but this was my worst morning yet. I had to greet an army of 30,000 old dudes—the ultimate tragedy a teenage boy could suffer!

"Kid, you're up early."

"Great. Get us thirty breakfast orders. No, make that forty."

It's not early cuz I didn't sleep! I was so miserable about the 30,000 old dudes that I couldn't sleep a wink!

And in addition to supplying the old dudes here, I was adding new traps to Murimuri Castle. I was *crazy* busy. The old dudes began their strategy meeting about this and that and all the rest. At least their meeting made my job easier. They told me exactly where the troops were and where they were going, allowing me to set up traps at those points. Still, 30,000 men were more than enough to clear all the dungeon traps, and if they decided to all rush through at once I wouldn't be able to implement my stall tactics. I'd only have my emergency stone golem measures. If they reached their breaking point and went for it, I couldn't make more money and the Theocracy could speed up their own plans.

"We want to invade the fortress by tonight. We nobles won't pass our days sitting in this damn hole in the ground!"

"I understand, but please bear with us another day. Once our house becomes the one to overcome this dungeon, we'll be able to one-up that backwater, Omui."

Fortunately for me, they used self-delaying tactics with bonus information-leaking functionality. And on top of that, they were handing me some pretty preposterous profits too.

“Being a famed house is a beautiful thought, but there’s no romance in our situation here.”

“We’ll refresh ourselves in the frontier. I’ve heard that the women of the frontier are beautiful for country wenches.”

“Hmph, I sure could use a taste. Let us hurry up and smash our way out of this hellhole!”

Huh? Well, as a teenage boy, I wasn’t going to disagree about the lack of romance, but if you try to taste *those* women, they’ll bite your head off. Those mean girls had more allies than you could imagine, and these old dudes seemed kinda weak by comparison. If this gang of geezers tried to storm that wooden club city, they’d just get bonked. The end. It was a war zone over there—the terror of the frontier. The endless hordes of club-wielding housewives would bash your head in before they bite it off!

“Another swamp? I can’t believe it.”

“Can we fill it?”

“A bridge should be faster.”

They finally made it to the central swamp equipped with falling rock hazards. It was a simple course, with an ordinary bog and then rocks falling from the ceiling, so I’d added some rotting and dissolving effects to the swamp water. Oh, but they said they were gonna go for a bridge, huh? That was the right choice. My poor virgin eyes didn’t want to see any naked old dudes.

“Hurry up and get the rope set!”

“These useless bastards!”

I’d even drenched some of the rocks in oil, but none of the soldiers were going for it. I went to the trouble of making them colorful and everything. *Y’all just gotta jump on them, don’t you see?* And if you do, you’ll slip and fall! Why didn’t they appreciate the cleverness of my construction here? At least pretend like you get it! Make me feel good about

my hard work, c'mon! Throw in some *Don't try it! It's dangerous!* yells? Y'know, for flavor?

"Make sure you cross the swamp!"

"Finish the bridge at all costs. Hurry!"

I could fill the swamp higher to slow them down, but I really didn't want to see naked old dudes, so I chose to let them pass. That's how much was at stake for me and my poor eyes.

I worked up some stair traps to make up for it. There were multiple rows of stairs, and if you chose the wrong one, they would turn into a slide and send you back where you came from. I worked hard on those traps. And of course, when you reached the bottom, you got your equipment dissolved.

"Class Rep worked hard on this plan. She drew a diagram and everything. She was being a pain about it, to be honest, so I just went with it."

But no one had experienced the slide yet! Another trap went by without its time to shine. When I told Class Rep that Princess Girl's group didn't pass through here, she was pretty bummed out. Did she want the Princess Girl to lose her clothes too?!

"The bridge is complete. The troops are heading up the stairs."

"Someone, sprint up and send down a rope for the others!"

And there went all the old dudes sliding to the bottom. It took about an hour for the Dissolve effect to work completely, and then another hour for them to discover how the trap worked. Until then, the old dudes just kept on falling down the slide, their equipment melting off of them. It was like a portrait of hell itself.

"Hang on—don't tell me this is what Class Rep *wanted* to see?! Does Class Rep have an old-dude stripping fetish?!"

I'd get a beating if I asked her, so it would be better to leave it there. So, off I went to sell 30,000 lunch orders! I was starting to run out of stock myself. I'd have to steal it back soon.

"It's all delivered? You've got your orders of watery orphan vegetable scrap soup, with plenty of chunks of hard bread on the side."

The orphans had managed to survive eating that every single day, and a small portion of it at that. I wouldn't allow any complaints about this menu, even at this sky-high price point. It was a waste to even give dinner to soldiers on their way to kill the people of the frontier.

"Everything is set up: all of the third regiment soldiers have fled. Nothing abnormal."

Stalker Girl's clan provided some stealthy assistance in helping the ordinary soldiers make a getaway. There were plenty of sons of nobles in the third regiment, broken off from the king's army to shave down the power of the king. Technically they were princes, but they were still old dudes, so I didn't mind burning them.

"Will we be able to get out of here by tonight?"

I had spent both lunch and dinner with old men—what greater humiliation and disgrace could my teenage-boy self suffer? I had already resisted burning them for over twenty-four hours, and they were *still* overflowing out the pseudo-dungeon exit! This was testing the limit of my patience.

"Aaaagh, I just wanna burn 'em up so bad! Old dudes haven't reached their real potential until they're charcoal. The best old dude is one that was never born!"

Miss Armor Rep was well on her way, I bet. That would solve one problem, but it was too soon—Class Rep and the girls would get here tomorrow at the earliest. Those old dudes certainly weren't getting out of here tonight. Maybe tomorrow morning, but more likely not till the afternoon. Mr. Meridad's elite vanguard would take two days to arrive. As for the nerdlords and Slimey…they weren't gonna make it. I'd only be able to stop the first three. Four and five would necessitate a retreat.

"When things turn bad, send up a smoke signal," I said. "Not celebratory fireworks, okay?"

"H-how does that work, sir?"

Despite how bad things had gotten, I asked Stalker Girl's clan to keep a watch. Forget about the nerdarinos. I didn't think they'd actually get so mad they'd invade, but whatever. They made it to a fantasy world, but they had kept what they really wanted bottled up due to being around their

classmates and all. Now they were finally free from any obligations and they realized they were *angry*.

All that was fine. They didn't have to hold back anymore. They might get reckless, but they had Slimey to cover them, so they'd be safe. A group of heroes had awakened at last! To be fair, the meatheads had no hope of waking up, since they were always sleeping. We'd ignore that for the sake of poetry. The jock brigade just needed a good rampage. A good, fierce fight was all they needed out of life, and they never got to indulge in one until they came to this world. Although it wasn't like they themselves were aware of that…so, uh, whatever.

It looked like I failed yet again. It was only natural that I couldn't handle everything, but I still paid for it. The bill always comes due in the end. Paying the price wouldn't absolve me of anything, but just like the old prince dude, I didn't have anything else to pay with besides my own life.

I had to stop every danger I could, and protect everyone I could. It was all I had to give. In the end, I didn't have enough. We never did. Forty-three people—that was how many of us got summoned to this world. Thirteen of them were no longer among us, one of whom I killed with my own hands. I could be clever all I wanted, but it would never make up for that.

Still, I had to pay for what I lacked. I just didn't have any cards left to play. The stupid prince was probably giving up his stupid position back to the stupid old prince dude and getting crap from everyone. That old dude lived his dumb little life, sprinting across the kingdom—always useless, always a failure, but ready to give his life to save the world. Now it was my turn. Unlike him, there was no salvation waiting for me, but, well…fine.

"Hey, kiddo. You selling shoes?"

"If you don't have any, get us fresh shipment. On the double!"

"Oh, I've made plenty of shoes, but making old-dude shoes has been no fun for me, I can tell you that!"

I'd even figured out how to mass-produce moccasin boots, and they were a smashing success. *How did this tragedy befall me?* Even getting so damn rich didn't make up for this drudgery. *And I'm sure as hell not fitting y'all!* I wasn't going to be touching any old dude feet. Hell no!

Since I was getting sick of these old men, the best solution would be to let them get to the other side. The prospect of a break was enticing, but the church's preparations were underway. I had to keep stalling.

They finally buried the bog and began to mobilize their resources.

"The sweet, beautiful swamp that my teenage-boy heart poured all its longings into…" I sighed. "It had the power to cling to and melt away sweet maidens' equipment with the potent possibility of a *plink, pop, perk-up!* But all I got was a bunch of old dudes blooping and blopping and crossing my sweet swamp. I weep! Sob!"

I hadn't gotten an eyeful of naked old dude exposure, so why was I feeling so bummed out? Well, it was just impossible to be cheerful in the face of nasty old dude energy.

The sun should've set by now, and at this rate, it seemed feasible to keep up the old dude ripping off through tomorrow morning.

"I can't stand it anymore! I can't lay my eyes on another old dude! I wanna go home! I want Miss Armor Rep to get over here and be bubbly with me in the jacuzzi!"

I'd accidentally reach enlightenment from too much abstinence if this kept up. *What if I end up standing before that old god dude? I'm gonna yank out his damn beard!* I need the God of Miss (Freaking) Armor (Sexy) Rep (Chicks) a hell of a lot more than him. *So this is a holy war, and my church is the Church of Freaking Sexy Chicks!* That would guarantee a profitable and pornographic pandemonium! A devastatingly sexy, ec-sex-tatic, and problematic victory!

"Calm down! Lady Angelica has arrived. She's hiding outside."

One of Stalker Girl's clan's old dudes grumbled an update in my ear. The Goddess herself arrived! *That's one down.*

"If I don't let out my raging teenage-boy soul for just an hour or something I might go crazy… Can't I find someone to take over my shift while I go, uh, unload myself? I mean, these geezers probably won't move much till night, so if something happens…just lemme know?"

"Leave it to us."

I used Dash straight into the deserted city. It goes without saying that the moment I found Miss Armor Rep, I immediately swept her to a deserted inn room and demolished that armor in a hard, hard, *hard* effort to dispel those dismal old-dude vibes!

"The old dudes were really surpassing my 'burn-'em-all' capacity! I'm still enduring some punishment from sending a few old guys who commented on my nasty expression to the bowels of the earth, but I managed to virtuously restrain myself from burning the rest of them. I really held myself back to just the occasional burying! I mean, I worked *so* hard! Can you blame me for not being perfect?"

Her eyes were crossed out—perfect Xs. I mean, my teenage-boy self had revealed its true form, melting away all of its fetters and unleashing a hyperdrive energy blast beam and stuff…so, yeah. It was inevitable. And you know what *it* is, right? Yeah, we boned.

But now, though the true crisis was just about to begin, Miss Armor Rep was completely out of action! *Crap.*

I knew I was gonna get whacked, so I rushed to make her the hemp hat I had promised first. I couldn't escape the lecture, but I wanted her to at least be happy about the hat. It wasn't much in the grand scheme of things, but if I could make her happy with a hat, I always, always would.

Without waking her up, I patted her head gently and wove a hat with my own hands. I may have gotten her out of the eternal darkness of the dungeon—I didn't have any guilt about that—but I couldn't help but doubt myself. Could I really make Angelica-san happy? I mean, I wasn't…er, put-together, so to speak. Was the only thing I gave her freedom?

She also has the girls, I thought. *They're close now.* The kids liked her too. Slimey would be back soon, and the nerd squad…eh, forget about them. But still, was she happy now? *That's all I want. Although…it looks like I sent her to heaven at the moment…*

DAY 70

MIDNIGHT

I think the girls should be concerned about their beef-on-rice problem, but it's too scary to say it out loud.

DESERTED NEIGHBORING CITY

WE FINALLY ARRIVED. We spotted some reinforcement units on the way and spent a bit of time plundering them, but Haruka-kun said that cutting off reinforcements was the first yippie ki-yay. I don't think that's what Bruce Willis meant?

"Angelica-san! Sorry we're so late."

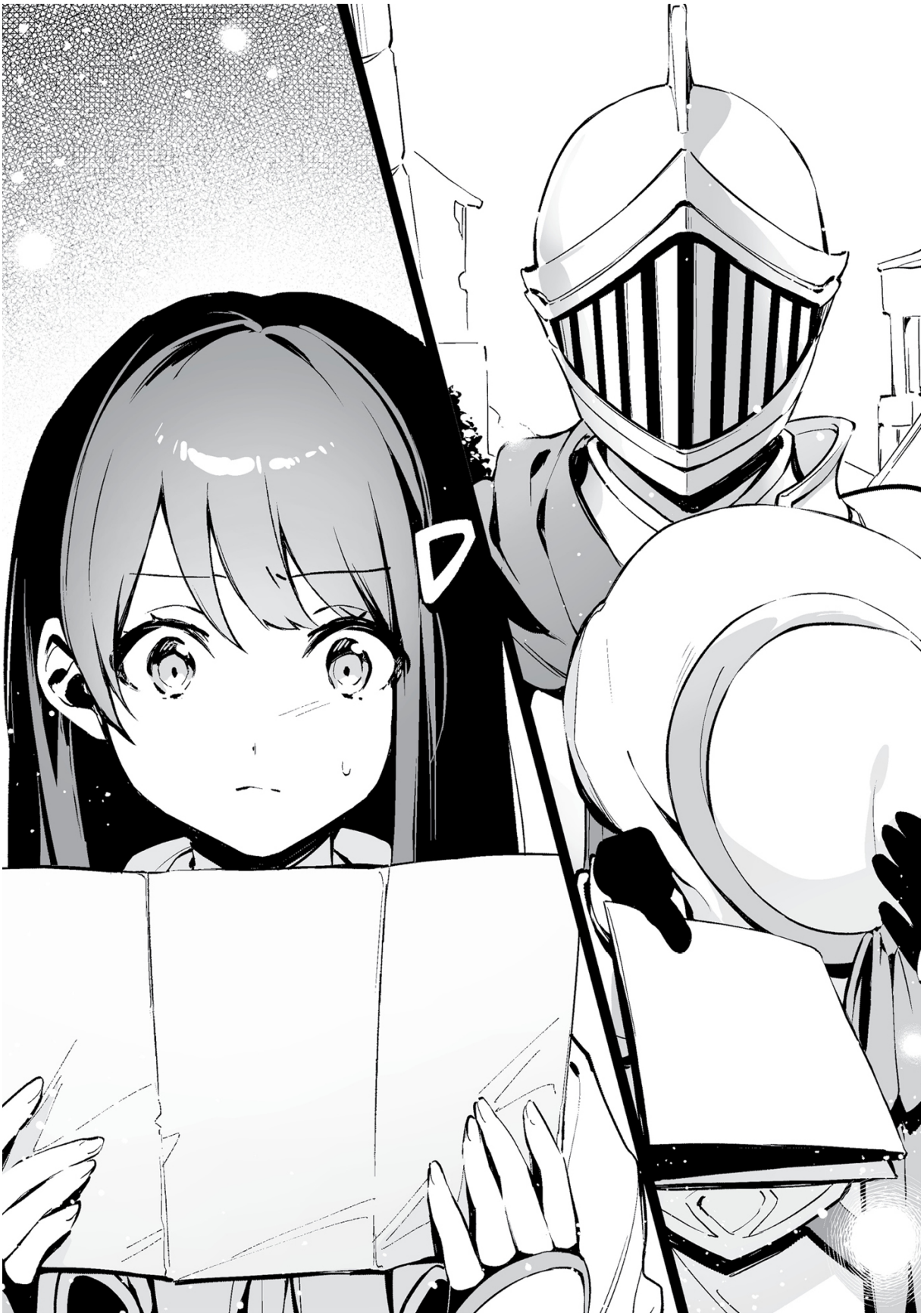
"Is Haruka-kun safe? Er, has he done anything crazy?"

"Angelica-san is here, the battle can't have started yet."

Angelica-san was in full equipment, but she cradled a hat in her arms like a baby. *I think you're supposed to wear that on your head?*

"That—oh!"

She handed over a letter from Haruka-kun. Or more like instructions? They were as incomprehensible as always, so why did I know exactly what he wanted?



According to one of the women from Stalker Girl's clan, Haruka-kun, whom we had been expecting to be facing off against an army of 30,000, wasn't fighting. Instead, he was actually running a monopoly rip-off scheme against his new enemy—his current customers.

The souvenir shop headquarters was flourishing inside the pseudo-dungeon. It had become a hit with the noble army, producing massive profits for Haruka-kun. And he was pretending to help those poor exploited nobles get through the dungeon. Yup, it sounded a little bit incoherent, but so did this letter. I mean, nothing that boy has done has ever made an ounce of sense!

Dear Whatever-Your-Names-Are / Everyone,

Today may or may not be an auspicious day—I mean, why would I be familiar with the fantasy world calendar? I dunno if I should say this 'cause I haven't summoned you guys or anything, but yeah, welcome to the shop and stuff?

To get to the point or whatever and so on, I'm gonna start saying stuff, 'cause this letter is like, a secret message and junk? Okay, like, see the map inside? I mean, it's there? If it's not, I forgot to put it in. That'd be bad!

So the Xs on this map are the dungeons outside of the frontier. 1-3 are for sure, 4-5 probably for realsies. Starting at 6 it's more like, maybe? Possibly? And stuff? So, like, look at the map. Please?

Now, I've already asked Miss Armor Rep to handle the biggest and baddest main-ish thing, so don't worry about that. I don't know whether 2 or 3 is the priority here, so just prioritize the primary one and primly pummel it? If it's rough, just run away, 'kay?

The church's divine punishment is a manmade dungeon Deluge. They can control it, so they're gonna direct it at the frontier. But if we don't beat the dungeons right, they could go "Deluge!" and seriously mess up the entire kingdom. It could turn into Deluge City, ya know?

So! Miss Armor Rep and Miss Glare Rep'll take two dungeons, and we'll have Mr. Meridad's squad take the third if they make it in time. If they don't, retreat back to the frontier, 'kay?

I'm in the middle of showing the noble army to Murimuri Castle, but it's a complete hellscape with nothing but old dudes, so we can't make our move till the church does, and when they do, they'll do some rebuilding and refocusing and really *let us have it? Probs? I mean, I haven't overheard them talk about it or anything.*

And by that I mean considering time and distance, Slimey and the nerdbrains won't make it in time, so if the fourth and fifth Deluges break out then you'll just need to retreat because…well, you can't get in over your heads. I'll work it out so you can retreat here. I know it's seriously bad and dangerous and stuff, but mind if you guys handle that?

So have a girls' meeting and decide. Please? If you can't get twenty people to participate, retreat right away. Do it fast, 'cause the Deluge might start before your meeting ends if you go at your usual pace.

Anyway, do what you can. If you can't, I'll just ask you guys to protect the frontier, so either way's fine, but just so you guys know, I'm out of manju already. Those noble old dudes ate 'em all up. So if you guys get back here I'd really appreciate if you beat the crap out of them and lectured them and stuff? I didn't do anything wrong, it was the old dudes who bought them all. Sooo, whatcha been up to? Making some mad stacks at the rip-off shop? Yeah?

Regrets,

Me

What a long letter! *And it's "Regards"!* Just how weird was he trying to make this letter? I mean, could you really call it a letter? And why was every other sentence a question?!

What I did understand was that Haruka-kun, who was supposed to be fighting an army of thirty thousand, was instead showing them through his dungeon and making sky-high profits as they went. Certainly, they could never get through the dungeon unless he gave them a hand, but why would he do that to begin with? Drawing them in to fleece them was certainly one answer, but that just meant his plan was more devious than we'd anticipated from the outset. He was itching to send his precious customers straight into

traps. With him in business there was no way to tell the difference between allies and enemies—was everyone his enemy?

"I suppose this is what Haruka-kun was trying to scheme around this whole time."

"Man-made Deluges… Those could wipe out the whole kingdom!"

"And from five different dungeons! After the kingdom finally achieved a little happiness… This is cruel beyond belief!"

This was intended as divine punishment—the will of God. If it was God's will for monsters to attack innocent, happy people, then I rejected it! Unforgivable!

"I'll do it," I said. "I'll stop the Deluge."

"Yeah. We can't let those monsters out," agreed Vice Rep A.

"I'll join," said Book Club President. "I've known Haruka-kun for eleven years, and this is the first time he's asked me for anything."

"I'm going for sure! I'll stop it no matter what!" cried Shield Girl.

"I can't just stay in the dungeon," said Fish Girl. "Plus the orphans are in the capital—we promised we'd come back to them!"

If we could stop all five Deluges, the kingdom would be saved. If we stopped three, we'd save the frontier, but the rest of the kingdom would suffer massive damage. The capital would be okay, the kids would be okay, but countless other people would die in all those other towns and villages. More kids would be orphaned as a result.

If the noble army couldn't break through the pseudo-dungeon, the church would probably decide to unleash the Deluges to topple it all at once. That was why Haruka-kun drew them in to buy time. He probably wanted to do a little ripping off while he was at it, to be fair. What he lacked was time and the cards in his hand to win the game.

"Five dungeons…"

"It'll be hard without Oda-kun's group, and I doubt they'll make it in time."

"Why'd they have to go off and invade the Merchant Kingdom?!"

“We’ll have to start lumping Oda-kun and his friends in with the meatheads when they get back!”

“They just gotta get back on their ship. It didn’t take us, like, much time to arrive here, right?” asked Vice Rep B.

“Something must have happened in the Merchant Kingdom. They wouldn’t have attacked for no reason.”

Our best guess based on that letter was that Haruka-kun was deliberately using stall tactics to buy us time. Infiltrating the enemy army alone… Operating the souvenir shop… At least he was making a ton of money while he was at it.

He had sent Oda-kun’s group out on a mission, and they’d turned it into their own personal cause. They’d been singled out by Haruka-kun as the strongest and had only just started to fight as if they knew it. They’d been skilled and efficient, but passive. Despite that, they hadn’t been knocked out even once.

I don’t mean they were focused on tanking, or on finding the opponent’s weak point. They always chose the most efficient possible solution for handling a foe. To think that *those* boys had chosen to launch an attack on their own—there had to have been a good reason. Best to put it out of mind.

“So he’s ushering the nobles through the pseudo-dungeon and ripping them off. If he’s not fighting, I guess we don’t need to worry.”

“Of *course* we gotta worry!” said Vice Rep B. “He’s in major danger!”

“He’s taking on the worst of it. Something more dangerous than dealing with a Deluge.”

The noble army of thirty thousand men was just a decoy. The main church force was behind them and it sounded like they had a trump card on top of that. Something that the church would unleash only if a series of Deluges failed—whatever it was had to be unimaginably destructive.

Haruka-kun didn’t write anything about it in his letter, which probably meant he didn’t know what it was. There was no use in trying to guess if he couldn’t figure it out. Despite the danger and uncertainty, he

intended to clear it all by himself so we'd have a route to retreat back to the frontier.

"I know we already came all the way here, but if we have to keep an eye on two or three dungeons, we should get going, right?"

"He sent us a letter, which must mean he can't get out of there yet."

"The war's already begun, or it's about to…"

Should Haruka-kun actually defeat the 30,000 soldiers, he'd have the church army to deal with next. The church had prepared itself to overcome the pseudo-dungeon, Murimuri Castle, and even the frontier army. If Haruka-kun somehow managed to defeat the Church's army, they'd trigger the Deluges. If we took down all the Deluges, then there was the Church's trump card on top of it. This was the glory and the terror of the army of God.

It was rare for Haruka-kun to truly hate an enemy. This time, though, he did. He was surely mad on Angelica-san's behalf—he treated the church with a contempt reserved for a life form lower than insects. I couldn't agree with Haruka-kun more! They were the worst, lowest, meanest, vilest, most shameful creatures! Anyone who understood the madness their God demanded and still took his side was a madman themselves!

"Let's begin our girls' meeting. We have a vote threshold of twenty. If you want to go to the dungeon, raise your hand."

"We're going!!!" everyone shouted.

I didn't need to ask to know the answer. Without Haruka-kun, Oda-kun's group or Kakizaki-kun's group, facing off against a Deluge was too dangerous for the twenty of us. But still, everyone raised their hand. It was unanimous.

"It's going to be really dangerous, so do be ready to retreat at any time. Your life comes first. Promise?"

"Promise!"

We made it all the way to the pseudo-dungeon, but now Haruka-kun had to continue the fight alone—if you could call ripping off an army a fight. And while the business was booming, any fighting he did would be both futile and facile.

Still, this is what we wanted. Haruka-kun didn't have enough tools or enough time. We'd do everything we possibly could to be useful.

Because he asked. Haruka-kun, who would never ask us to do anything dangerous if we could possibly avoid it, finally had. We'd give him all we had. At last, Haruka-kun needed us. *Our pride as maidens depends on this!*

DAY 71

MORNING

With squishy-squishy teenage girls, I don't need no mushy-mashy old dudes!

PSEUDO-DUNGEON

THEY FILLED IN EVERY PITFALL, muscling their way through the pseudo-dungeon and throwing the sheer size of the army at it. *I don't think I can draw this out any longer.*

The church's force had grown restless, and I was starting to feel bad for the stone golems. They had been pretending they couldn't move this whole time. They were shaking now!

The army made it to the doors. It was a long hallway filled with trapdoors, but they had more than enough people to sacrifice to reveal all of them. It would reduce their numbers by a few hundred, but an army of that size would barely feel the loss. They were taking the brute force approach. After a quick round of equipment-rotting, my rafflesia pals swiftly backed off and hid for the sake of my poor innocent eyes.

"Forget the aid—just open the doors!"

"And hurry, holes in the ground are opening up!"

We were about witness old dudes with nothing impressive to show off lose all of their equipment. They were half-naked and wrapped up in tentacles—I didn't want to see that! I didn't renovate my ass off for *this!* I built this dungeon hoping that one day, some beautiful female adventurers would stumble into this dungeon and all my tentacled dreams would come true! Nobody knew how I'd suffered to make that dream a reality, and now these wrinkly, ugly old dudes were squirming all over it! They were brutalizing an innocent teenage boy's long-held dream!

"Finally—the exit, at last?! Send out the troop of rogues first!"

They were throwing away their own troops, with more filling in behind them. I didn't even know how to calculate the profit from so many dungeon passes. It was only a little less than what I'd made off of the Merchant Kingdom.

Over a hundred people went flying back to the exit from my last devious slide trap, but that was it. The final trap. They had made it to the other side of the pseudo-dungeon. *Didn't calculate that.*

"More than 30,000 soldiers are going to make it through. I didn't prepare nearly enough commemorative congratulations bath sponges! I'll need 40,000 participation trophies. But…they didn't beat the dungeon fair and square, so maybe I don't need them. Plus, do old dudes deserve trophies?"

Crafting those sponges would be a pain too. *Even freshly scrubbed old dudes are still old dudes!*

The church's force followed at a distance. They would have split if they'd already launched a Deluge, so that was yet to come. They were holding those in reserve.

"We finally made it out, huh?"

"I see… So, that's the castle. It won't be easy to take it out, but they shouldn't have many soldiers. We'll overcome them with numbers."

"If we commence preparations, we should be able to launch our attack before nightfall."

"A night battle will also disrupt their vision."

"Kid, get us some tables and chairs. Take the money from the officers. And throw in some tea and manju."

Great, they'd given me their strategy again. *I guess I'll eavesdrop on everything I can from them and then start the battle.* I needed to start taking pieces in this chess match. I'd collate the strategies we'd prepared for this moment and begin the all-out war of attrition. The bloodshed would start now.

"Man, this is gonna take a while. I'd really like some more time."

I still hadn't bought enough time for the frontier army to catch up. And I had five dungeons to clear of Deluge and three teams to do it with.

I'd just have to defeat all my enemies here. At a certain point, I couldn't save everyone.

"We have completed equipping the Third Royal Division! Between the noble army and mercenaries, 30,000 pike-wielding heavy infantry soldiers have been dispatched to the battlefield."

"The magic battalions are also re-equipped! However, we won't be able to fight for some time. We used too much MP in the dungeon."

"The magic items for the siege are nearly ready. Our Theocracy backup is currently assembling spellstones."

So, they would use heavy infantry for defense to assault Murimuri Castle while using their magic battalions and church items to attack from a distance? Then why was the Theocracy also dispatching soldiers? They didn't seem like they were headed for the front line; I couldn't see the magic battalions either. Maybe they were going to use the magic items? I was surprised they showed up before they sacrificed the noble army first, but I supposed that the overall situation hadn't changed.

They must still be waiting for something. Whatever it was would be bad, that was all I knew. Top-class equipment and elite soldiers aside, these guys were mostly rank-and-file schmucks. They were scheming something, and they'd probably launch it once the battle turned chaotic for the noble army. Right now, the church seemed almost *too* hands-off.

Only the ordinary soldiers are moving. They were low level and poorly equipped. They weren't even well trained—it was just a mass army of riffraff. They didn't stand a chance in a fortress siege. There had to be another plan.

The small force rallied behind the noble army was the true enemy. Were the Deluges really their only trump card? If so, what exactly was the point of deploying all these soldiers? I thought that the Deluges were to be used in case where all else failed—an emergency measure saved for the last possible second. I would be more than happy if they went without deploying them altogether, but the longer we waited, the more the possibility persisted. I'd have liked to thin out the church's forces if I could, but making the wrong move could backfire.

From everything I'd gathered about the operation they referred to as "Divine Punishment," it seemed to indicate an artificially triggered Dungeon Deluge. I don't know how they'd do it, but it was essentially a Deluge directed at a certain area. The legends said that every hero who went out to fight an active Deluge perished. If that was the power they planned to unleash, then things were about to get very difficult.

If those Deluges were enough to take out whole armies and hero-class adventurers, they might be enough to even threaten Miss Armor Rep. That's why I sent her to the most dangerous, farthest dungeon—she was literally safer that way.

As I strolled around the plain in front of Murimuri Castle, muttering to myself, I made my way back to the fort. The enemy would be sitting ducks from here. *I won't let a single soldier into the frontier,* I thought. *I won't let a single person die. We'll have to kill each other here.*

"Fantasy worlds are pretty screwed up after all," I sighed. "The old world was screwed up, too, with all those wars that spanned generations and stuff, but one teenage boy versus forty thousand old dudes? That's screwed up beyond everything I've ever heard. But I'd happily face off against forty thousand young ladies. Yes, in fact, I'd gladly take them on!"

Alas, they were old dudes. Across the plain, a sea of old dudes—that's where I sent my magic. I supposed no matter what I sent, only old dudes would be there to receive it. There was no good outcome here.

"Now that the souvenir shop's temporarily closed, I guess this makes me…unemployed? A NEET guarding a fortress? Unsalaried? I really *am* unemployed! Well, at least I'm not leveling up Shut-In anymore! What kind of shut-in runs around a whole damn kingdom and ends up a NEET because he's way too busy to even apply for a job? And as for the loner bit…well, I am a loner? Anywho, now that business is over, it's time for warfare. No complaints now, 'kay? Well, there is no *later*, so there will be no complaints, because I'm gonna kill you. Man, I guess that's just what war is…"

The soldiers were shrieking, holding their dungeon passes out to the implacable stone golems that leapt out of the fortress walls as they screamed. I made sure to tell them that those passes only worked for stone golems *inside* the pseudo-dungeon, but did they listen? No.

“They were only pretending like they couldn’t move, but they did fulfill their promise!”

No returns! Spotting the stone golems, the noble army tried to reassemble themselves into formation. 40,000 soldiers crammed into the narrow plain, completely losing control.

“That damn brat tricked us!”

“Lay ’em out!” I shouted. “Fire!”

“Aaaaaaghhh!”

The air shook with the howls of 40,000 old dudes. *Blech.*

The heavy infantry advanced, but the nobles only had the equipment from the Third Royal Division and didn’t have a lot of battle experience. A quarter or so were lagging, others broke off, so they didn’t have a unified push. Still, with that size of an army, they were enough to make the earth shake. That was all they could do—charge. Don’t underestimate what an attack like that can do with so many people. Thirty thousand men charging all at once, enough to flatten a dungeon, much less some stone golems.

“Man, I really did get thrown into a fantasy world and spent day after day eating mushrooms in a forest.” What an easy life that’d been by comparison! I was getting all nostalgic.

Two months later, here I was, on the receiving end of a siege from over 30,000 old dudes. After all that time eating mushrooms in a forest, who could’ve expected me to be out here serving up my own snacks? A few bamboo shoots would be tasty right about now.

I mixed some Wood magic with Holding magic, which I used on the entire plain. Time to grow bamboo!

“Grow as in, well, extend as in, I mean, I’d much rather *eat* some bamboo shoots but they’ve become a battle weapon for now. As in, bamboo spears, as in—my *god,* that’s a lot of impaled bamboo victims? Oops, I grew them too fast! Any shoots left to eat? That would’ve been the best possible outcome here…”

The number of bamboo forest victims made finding some tasty, tender shoots impossible. The magic growth made the shoots tall and

sturdy. And they'd grown fast. As in instantaneous… *Yeah, that bamboo isn't edible anymore.*

"Gaaah!"

"What the—ACK!"

"M-my legs! Waaaah!"

The charging old dudes got whacked, thwacked, and thrashed by the bamboo, and went rolling all over the place in their heavy armor. The rearguard could no longer see through the thick bamboo and had crowded together at a confused standstill.

Now 30,000 old dudes were in disarray, which made my job easy. I just used my Magic Hands to get into the gaps of 30,000 sets of armor, and then the death screams rose sharply, then stopped just as quickly. *Yup, I imbued magic into the entire plain.* Then, silence, as 30,000 souls were snuffed out.

I wanted to get the magic battalions too, but they made their move too quickly.

The ordinary troops were the only ones who had entered the bamboo forest—low-level civilian soldiers with shoddy equipment. The situation made me uneasy, so I used Earth Needle from a distance to stab the whole field of them. That was when they started to explode.

Dead soldiers—a terrorist bombing. Those crazed believers were equipped with some form of self-detonating explosive magic item that blew up the moment they died. They were dead no matter what, but I couldn't let them get too close to me. I had to snipe them from a distance.

The remaining knights of the church and magic battalions started to move. I needed to draw them closer to me. Sure, I was defending a damn fortress under siege by myself, but the sea of dead soldiers was really unpleasant, okay! That was a mud-wrestling pile of old-dude bodies—super gross!

Ugh, just ugh. Think of the tragedy! An innocent teenage boy could never conceive of the carnage, but here he was, a witness to it all! *I* was the real victim here!

“If the teenage boys of the world heard about this, they’d burst into tears! This has to be the worst thing that’s ever happened to us! Make it stop!”

I whipped up a bamboo wire trap with Magic Hands to cut down their numbers and draw them closer to Murimuri Castle. Then I whipped out the handy dandy “Eternal Trap: Creates traps over a designated area for all of eternity” that I picked up in the capital, and after that, I figured I’d retreat to inside the fortress walls. Even so, the combo of the sea of dead old dudes and the long-range magic now coming my way was just plain unpleasant.

“Holding out a fortress siege all alone with no reinforcements… That has to be a red flag for character death, right? What kinda next-level lonerism is this?!”

I was holed up all alone in a fortress, fighting against accepting any company. Really makes you think, doesn’t it?

DAY 71

NOON

According to the 100% clear guide to old dudes, those old dudes were bad old dudes?

MURIMURI CASTLE

INSIDE

SCREAMS CONTINUED to ring out throughout my bamboo forest… Bamboo village…? Whatever you wanted to call it. It pained me to keep going, but I had manufactured all of these wire traps and pitfalls, so I had no choice but to hear the *plunk*, *fall*, *plop*, and the explosions (followed by explosive screaming). I'd probably heard a few hundred so far, and there were *so* many more to go. Why did old dudes always come after me in this world? This had to be way more old dude encounters than chance typically offered. Karma must've been intervening. I needed a psychic to look into the root of this miserable karma!

The battle had already shifted from siege defense to indoor guerilla warfare. To me, though, it felt more like a classic *Bomberman* game. The problem was that they were trying to bomb *me* though, which made it no fun.

"What kind of game tries to blow up the actual player and only has old dude enemies?! These old dudes are so realistic! At least make 'em chibi or something!"

Over ten thousand soldiers still remained. The church force that had been keeping their distance, lurking back in the pseudo-dungeon, was starting to gather as well. Those self-detonating bombs were getting more and more annoying. After inviting these old dudes into my range, I still couldn't get close to them in battle. If one of my spells accidentally revealed my location, I'd be surrounded and exploded in a second.

Guerrilla warfare meant making a disturbance to lure the enemy in, then crushing the flood of old dudes who came looking with a trap. These

endless old guys kept coming, no matter how many of them blew up. I'd be done for if they surrounded me…but even splitting them up didn't decrease their numbers. I had no choice but to keep isolating them and targeting them in small bunches.

"These old dudes are creepy-crawly biohazards! I can't collaborate with the maker of a product like this!"

If they made it out of Murimuri Castle, it was over. I had to keep them busy here. On the other hand, I had to keep them from maliciously murdering me too! Hell no! I also had to stay away from their hair-trigger explosives. But yeah, anyway—they needed to be stopped here. If the man-made Deluges came for the frontier, the frontier army didn't stand a chance. I hadn't been able to build new city walls for all of the settlements there. It would ruin the soil and slow down trade in the area. Historically speaking, those scummy theocracies loved taking hostages in warfare. There was so much at stake here.

"Number three…is a no go, I guess?"

I saw two smoke signals this morning. My classmates must have made it to their dungeon. They had to have delved in by now. We could prevent two of the Deluges, at least.

I wanted to go on the offensive, but those Theocracy soldiers were strong. They numbered at least a thousand and had a handful of extravagantly armored troops within that well surpassed the rest. That was why I had to lure them all the way into the fortress—to prevent them from starting the artificial Deluges. If they did, they would just kill their own soldiers. They couldn't turn back either, because they'd get stopped by the pseudo-dungeon. They couldn't activate the Deluges until after I was dead. However, my real fear was that if they felt cornered, they might pull out their final secret trump card. For now, I just had to keep shaving their numbers down. I hadn't seen a third smoke signal yet. A fourth wouldn't be happening.

A drawn-out battle worked to my disadvantage, but I had no choice at this point. I had to keep drawing them in and eliminate as many as possible.

"Both of my masterpieces, the pseudo-dungeon and Murimuri Castle, are now completely infested with old dudes! Imagine what this'll do to my teenage-boy motivation! I dropped hints and even fliers to raise a honey-

trap event flag, and now I've got thirty—no! Forty *thousand* old dudes up in my grill?! Plus they're old god dude fanatics—legit perverts! If you wanna blow up so bad, go blow up hugging that god dude! Get your god fetish outta here!"

Tell us to get off our screens all you want, old dudes, but don't try to hug and blow up in the faces of healthy, virile teenage boys! Thank you*!*

"We don't want old-dude-body dynamite! We want hot babes with dynamite bodies! Could I get one trap of the latter, please? I'll happily charge into that myself! One hundo-percent guaranteed!"

Coincidentally, that Eternal Trap I picked up was doing its thing as I ran around Murimuri Castle, laying traps and killing old dudes. I doubted it would work on the Theocracy knights though. Once I took out this batch of obnoxious old dudes, I'd be able to launch some blitzkrieg warfare against them. They were the most surprising of my invited guests.

I needed to preserve my MP, but I couldn't fight the soldiers hand-to-hand. I wanted to lure them closer, but I'd be a goner if they surrounded me. And I couldn't let them get out of here into the frontier either. What a mess.

Time to get back to basics. I may have been weak and at a low level, but I had a lot of skills and sold equipment. Because of that, I'd forgotten an important tool. At first, I fought without any items at all, and man I was sweating.

I had to get back to the beginning. The basics from that early period.

"Eeeeeeeek!"

In other words…the ol' sneak up from behind and bonk 'em. I gave 'em a whack to knock 'em out and zipped away. *There's something so nostalgic about this!*

"Death to the old duuuudes!"

I was just disinfecting the fortress. An old dude infestation removal service. *Gotta wipe 'em all out or they'll just reproduce.* It was pretty tough to restrain myself so that they wouldn't die—if they did, they'd explode. If they stayed conscious, they'd activate the bomb themselves.

"Old dudes seriously suck ass!" I groaned. "Old-dude suicide bombers—shouldn't *I* be the one bombing *them*?"

I should've prepared myself a bow-and-arrow, or at least a bow-gun or something. It would've been useful for me when they started running away. Bonking those old dudes was way more satisfying than I remembered. I was in a high-density old dude hell, after all—I had plenty of stress that I needed to take out!

"I even tried scattering poisonous mushrooms everywhere! Why won't they pick them up and eat them?!"

Only three old dudes fell for that trap. If I could just figure out their weak point, I'd easily exterminate them all… I'd eradicate them from the entire world!

The Theocracy's troops had withdrawn, so I couldn't target them. A lot of them looked to be tailing the rear force. I just wanted to take out the bomber dudes and the magic battalions, but all these mercenaries and bandits were getting in my way, but whacking old dudes was helping to relieve my long-built-up stress, ya know? *If I don't exterminate old dudes from this world, my stress is gonna simply get reborn! It's an infinite stress reincarnation cycle!*

Eternal Trap's ability was activated all over the fortress at the moment. Since I had the Trap Ring, I could move freely, nullifying its effect. The sheer number of bomber dudes getting up in my grill still kept me from approaching the Theocracy knights. And 'cause we were indoors, I was toast if they got in a circle around me. There was a lot of stuff to hide behind to dodge shrapnel, but there was still a limited amount of space. Those bomb blasts traveled a long way.

If I had mastered Magic Entanglement, things would be a lot easier, but I couldn't sustain the self-destruction over the course of a long battle. At the same time, if I *didn't* use it, my low stats would catch up to me. I used a bit at a time, using Entanglement to speed up and slip around the fortress. *Still, I'm done for if this is all I've got.*

The sun was still up. I didn't think I could buy enough time. The Theocracy hadn't had time to prepare yet, so they couldn't just start the Deluges either. The kingdom's First Division protected the border, so they had to stay put. The Second Division protected the capital. We only had the princess's Imperial Guard and Mr. Meridad's army coming after us. That

meant that if the Deluges broke out in the kingdom, the defenseless nation would be overrun.

"I'd rather deal with these guys at the frontier. Getting chased around inside a damn fortress—I mean, I'd be cool with it if it was hot chicks, but old dudes? Seriously?!"

I did *not* want to get captured and hugged by some old dude. Anything would be better than getting held and blown up by a bunch of old dudes! I had to take them out with Staff Mastery and then sprint away to escape from the explosion.

I finally thought I found some Theocracy knights. *This could get ugly*. The frontier was the remote countryside and rarely had contact with the outside world, with no information coming and going. I never got any complaints from the Fantasy World Shinto Muso Cane Style Association, but if the Theocracy had one of those, they'd definitely send me complaints!

I had the feeling I was at the utmost limits of Cane Mastery, so as I took out more mercenary troops with my staff, I rushed up to the terrace.

"If I knew that I was getting myself into this, I would've held on to some of those spellstone hand grenades," I sighed.

It was exactly the same as my days sneaking around the forest, launching surprise attacks on monsters. Even my equipment looked exactly the same. The only difference was my targets…but TBH, I couldn't really tell the difference between them and those goblins I'd clobbered, so it may as well have been exactly the same.

I kept low; once I got right up on them, I extended my staff and swept it under a bomber dude's legs. I then leapt in, stabbed the two old dudes and swept over my left shoulder to get the third. Then, from behind—*BOOM!* I didn't have much HP or Vitality, so I'd die instantly if I was in direct range of a single blast. I think my equipment could withstand one or two, but I didn't want to get up in an old dude's grill like that to test it out, you feel me?

With the combination of traps and surprise attacks, I probably got rid of a thousand or two, but those wormy-squirmy old dudes didn't stop coming. Where did they even spawn from, for heaven's sake? Don't tell me

the Theocracy's trump card was a man-made Old Dude Deluge?! *This world is doomed if that goes off.*

"There's no way to save the world from that. The world is legit over."

It finally started to get dark out. Only two smoke signals so far. No Deluge yet, but the frontier army hadn't made it here either. It would probably take them another day. The thing was that I didn't know if I could keep fighting that long.

Trapped between the explosions and the ranged attacks from outside, I didn't have space to maneuver. I could cause some disruption with my previously unused "Leather Mythical Beast Armor: Speed +50%, Vitality +30%, Slash-Proof. Magic Evasion. Physical Evasion. Incarnate." I hadn't used Incarnate before, so I was just finding out what it could do.

"Imma be real, charging straight in was faster than using Incarnate! There was this rumor about me forgetting about it and stuff, and I did kinda remember it when I went to power it up with mithril. I can't believe I never used it before?"

If I'd bothered to use Incarnate before now, I could have stayed well out of the way of those damn morning stars!

Mr. Incarnate here created an illusion of myself, but I could only use it when I was running away. There'd be no time to use Incarnate when escaping from a lecture! I had never been targeted by so many people at once before, so I'd never considered using it until now.

"Normally, even if a teenage boy gets targeted for a walloping, that doesn't mean getting arrows shot at his face! Right?"

Ah, the modern education system left me in despair! Anyway, this was getting annoying—the knights found me even when I concealed my presence. They were tailing me with high-speed movement skills. The Theocracy troops had managed to lock on to my location somehow, and they were coming after me in droves. I escaped through a secret passage. Then I bonked a few dudes guerrilla-style, they found me again, came after me…and I escaped through another secret passage.

After that, I did some more *sneak-bonk-sneak-bonk*ing and got found again…and escaped through another passage. *What a busy day.* I did make this place, after all, so I knew it inside and out.

We were locked into a stalemate—this was a war of attrition. They were exhausting their soldiers; I was exhausting my teenage-boy life force by being surrounded by so many old dudes. I didn't have Miss Armor Rep to replenish me, and even if she were here, she'd just get mad at me. A nice glare portion could give me the energy to deal with this old dude density, but I didn't even have that! All I could do was keep restoring my MP from my spellstone necklace and HP via mushrooms.

Is there any way I can slip over to that war city's adventurers' guild for a dose of glares from Miss Receptionist Rep? Because I got a strong sense that the commission list still hadn't changed over there…

DAY 71

NIGHT

Spawning Japan's fish ambassador in a fantasy world could lead to some serious ecological destruction!

MURIMURI CASTLE

INSIDE

TONIGHT WAS GONNA be a long one. I didn't know why I had to spend all night getting chased around by old dudes, but I didn't *want* to know why either, or know anything else that there was to know about these dudes. They were bald and chasing me and stuff!

"I guess if they just keep chasing me the traps'll take 'em all out. Once it gets dark, Jupiter Eye will give me an advantage. I guess there *is* a reason, but I don't want to know why old dudes are chasing a fresh and innocent teen boy!"

All the explosions and screams echoing through fortress were so annoying. *Even after the screaming stops, they're still annoying!*

"I don't want any old dudes being all like 'Wait for me!' and 'Lemme catch you!' and 'Weeeeheehee!' No thanks! Hard pass!"

A war of attrition… Still, the longer I could delay, the better. They couldn't start the artificial Deluge yet, which meant it was still possible for Slimey and the nerd brigade to make it in time. Even the kingdom army had to be getting ready to mobilize by now.

I hadn't prepped for the possibility of a long-term battle, so any minor miscalculation would make for a major miss-conflagration. I was still taking self-inflicted damage from Magic Entanglement. I had Revival to keep healing me no matter how much I took, but it wasn't well-suited for long fights. 'Cause it hurts, y'know?

For the sake of saving my MP, my only option was hand-to-hand combat—which was no good because they kept doing long ranged attacks.

Things were going to crap. Plus, who wants to go hand-to-hand (or hand-to-anything!) with old dudes?

"Jeeeeeez. This is real, unscheduled, unexpected, unctuous labor here. I figured I'd draw 'em in, buy time, and crush their trump card, but I could never have predicted these bomber dudes. Seriously, what kind of old dudes blow up? Old dudes are already such a pain, and now they *blow up*, too?! We need regulations to rein in this old dude existence crisis!"

It was too soon to act. If I showed my hand, they could crush me here and now. I had to take out whatever their secret weapon was the moment I spotted it. This was a protracted battle, and it was getting worse. Still, they'd suffered losses too—nearly half their forces at this point. That Eternal Trap was hard at work. And here I almost hadn't picked it up! Maid Girl was so mad at me back then. *I just found it on the ground though…*

Thanks to "Adhesive Boots: Allows the user to stand on walls and ceilings," I could easily maneuver around the fortress, but there were so many explosions to deal with. I really didn't expect that. The whole army was made up of fanatics. It was a shock that they were planning to kill themselves (not just others!) out of sheer love for that old god dude.

I figured they would have to sleep soon, but I couldn't make a move yet. The Deluges would be bad news for us. If I couldn't wait them out, then I'd have to strike the instant they drew out their secret weapon. Religious fanatics were bound to be good at tests of endurance! For now, I just had to keep conserving my energy, drawing up new traps, stacking my hand, giving myself guaranteed weapons, and so on as I went around *sneak-bonk*ing those old dudes.

I whipped around my elongated Universe Staff to knock 'em out, trample 'em, and end 'em. I had to get out of the way when I did, but when they blew up, they took out other old dudes with them. That sure sped things up!

I had sent my demon scythes out to deal with some reinforcements, but after all that suicide-bombing, they were in pretty rough shape. I wondered if some mushrooms could fix them up… Maybe if I vaporized mushrooms and sprayed it all over 'em? *Yeah, this seems to work? Spray spray?*

I started to feel a difference in the magical atmosphere. The knights of the church had arrived. I saw the magic shimmering in the air through Jupiter Eye.

Are they gonna use a giant spell? Or are the knights finally going to attack directly? Or are they going to launch the Deluges? Or…are they going to use their secret weapon?

The old dudes retreated. I just wished they'd retreat into the afterlife! But no, they were just leaving the fortress. What a useless bunch of old guys.

The knights were on the move and headed my way. Along with them came the secret weapon—a burst of MP and a glimmering violet light. *I feel like I've seen this before?* There was something placed in the middle of the room…a statue? No, a coffin. Tutankhamun's golden coffin?

"They got the design wrong," I said. "This one's got kinda European vibes, know what I mean?"

This is it.

"Still, it's King Tut-esque, and that familiar purple light I was talking about is coming from there, right? Yeah, the Sphinx and mummy thingamabob! What was that? Underrevival? Underrebirth? No, no, it was Underrenovate…hang on, that's the one skill I *have* seen! It's er, what it's called—oh, Underworld, that's it!"

I heard that whenever you forget something, it means that the memory got cut off from your brain. But when you remember it, the memory reconnects, and your brain processes all related information. So I suddenly remembered—*I'm a boy!* A healthy teenaged boy, sound of mind and body! *I'm as shocked as you are!*

"I've dealt with false accusations since the dawn of time, but my pink and healthy teenage brain is fresh and innocent, I swear!"

Everything was going to be all right, I knew it. Those bare legs—legs that stayed bare all the way up, but not like, *all* the way up, you know? This is still appropriate for teens! But where the bare skin stopped was well within the danger zone for a teenage boy—that seductive figure was absolutely *not* boding well for the purity of my emotions!

Yep, because inside that golden coffin was a beautiful, alluring, voluptuous woman. Although she looked young… Would *girl* fit better? Delicate chains bound her to the tomb. She wore a translucent shawl, a dress—well, it looked more like a bikini, or like some sort of sexy belly dancer outfit. In the midst of all the dazzle, was I really about to encounter some sort of seductive, scantily-clad, sexy Persian or Egyptian babe? She was hot!

A number of long, see-through shawls draped over and around her body, over the knit bikini-thing and under the silver chains. Her bottom attire dropped down like veils: a translucent skirt that didn't completely hide her long, luscious legs. Her entire top was completely see-through except for the bra portion. *If she starts belly dancing, I could probably make a ridiculous profit off ticket sales?* Heck, I'd even pay!

Her "equipment," if you could call it that, was an Egyptian-themed bikini and sarong done in a chain stitch. The tassels dangling down from her sarong were all chains. Thankfully, it was all completely see-through and revealing, dangling gently against her naked legs. The outfit was nothing short of marvelous.

"So, are those chains her weapon? Every time she uses them, she'll wind up with fewer clothes…which means more exposure! Now *that's* a fight I'm looking forward to!"

Her body was incredible. I just wanted to stare at it, but I couldn't with all this purple light. Yup, that was definitely Underworld. The skill of the Sphinx that Class Rep and the girls had acquired: the power to revive an infinite number of dead bodies.

"Well, not really *revive*, seeing how they come back as zombie-things, but they're unkillable and won't quit coming back so…oh god, an infinite old dude revival? Don't tell me she's got Stench Revival too?!"

But before this lovely lady unleashed her erotic exposure attack, I'd have to deal with unlimited revived old dudes with a side of stench. That was bad. I may have made Murimuri Castle big enough for a garrison, but it was about to get stuffed with 40,000 old dude shamblers. That would make Murimuri Castle 640 percent old dudes in no time! I'd never get the stink out of the walls!

"They drew me in with a half-naked, sexy-ass Egyptian belly dancer for a night of teenage-boy warfare… Just please don't let the old dudes pop back up like sea foam! I could go for a frothing, bubbly, hot-spring bath with this hot chick for some hot, bubbly activities. We could do long baths and bathrobe fashion shows, no old dudes invited! I'll go simmer in a hot bath, but not a sea of old dudes! Never!"

The zombies moved pretty quickly. Maybe it was because they'd died so recently. Still, most of them were wearing heavy armor, so they weren't all that fast. The blown-apart old dudes didn't seem likely to spring back to life, so I escaped the old dude stench and went up to the tallest tower in Murimuri Castle. I may've been a shut-in, but I couldn't activate Shut-In right now. This wasn't my home, so I couldn't use the skill. Now it was my turn.

Roughly 40,000 old-dude zombies squirmed below. Who cared where they were? *I don't have any interest in old-dude zombies either!*

If I used my own trump card now, then I couldn't do it again. But this was it—I was cornered. *Well, I'm screwed.* I couldn't stand the old-dude stink for another second! *Spare me, please!*

"I believe I can flyyyyyyy!" I cried and leapt off the tower. There was no more saving this fortress from old-dude stink. The best bet was to obliterate the whole structure.

A bang gave way to a pillar of fire. Murimuri Castle, stuffed to bursting with 40,000 old dudes, burst into raging flames. An inferno blasted up from top to bottom. Huge booms erupted as the building started to crumble. Now I just had to fly over to the real Murimuri Castle behind the now-flaming Murimuri Castle. Oh, yeah, didn't I mention? I built a new one and kept it buried until now, so I swapped them out. My 40,000 enemies were buried now, albeit at the cost of one of my only secret weapons. To make matters worse, I spent a ton of MP doing it.

The former Murimuri Castle had anti-siege skills imbued into the walls, but the new Murimuri Castle had additional strengthening to endure large-scale monster stampedes. It'd been powered-up from top to bottom in an all-new fortress design. The former Murimuri Castle sank. It went deeper and deeper underground as a huge hole opened up under it. It was like a well now, or a pond—listen, I'm just saying it was full of water. It would be just lovely if the old dudes could do me a favor and drown to death! Anyway, this would make their forces suffer and slow the enemy's roll.

"Maybe I can let Fish Girl out in there once things calm down again? But what if she spawns and I end up with a whole school of fish girls?"

This was the last line of defense for a potential Deluge. The neighboring domain and city would get destroyed, yes. But now the frontier had a final stronghold to fall back to.

DAY 72

BEFORE DAWN

A god that doesn't take responsibility can't really be called a god.

NEO-MURIMURI CASTLE

INSIDE

AFTER USING SO MUCH MP, I wouldn't be able to activate my Lifesaving skill anymore. I had made sure to stock up on spellstones for my MP battery for this very purpose, but destroying the former Murimuri Castle had taken more juice than I'd expected.

"I hadn't expected the old-dude revival to produce an extra 30,000 old dudes!" I exclaimed. "Every single one of them, old!"

Now they wouldn't be able to move even after Underworld revived them, but now I had to create some sort of underground seal for the fort. That would cost additional MP. Since I didn't prepare the seal in advance, I almost couldn't seal the place in time.

First up was my bamboo forest—I'd planted the bamboo in advance, so I just needed to use Wood magic to make it grow. That was a way more economical use of my magic than Earth Needle. The Eternal Trap was an item, so I didn't need to use any MP at all to activate that. I actually managed to restore some MP while I was running around inside thanks to Magic Absorption.

I had also managed to create some fissures and cracks in the structure of the former Murimuri Castle while I was running the souvenir shop business in the pseudo-dungeon to help it break down more easily. The fire was accelerated by the oil I drizzled all over the building while I was running around the secret passageways, so all that was left to do was ignite the flame. That saved me a lot of MP for blowing the whole thing up.

Underworld had been a wrench in my plans. It meant I had to use way more magic than I had planned for. Obviously, I had prepared Neo-Murimuri Castle in the case of a Deluge. I purposefully built it to stay

concealed underground so I would only need to use magic when bringing it up to the surface. Relatively efficient, but that method still required a ton of MP expenditure.

"That's half my MP *and* one of my secret weapons used up. I had no choice, but…yikes!"

I knew that the fires and collapsing building wouldn't be enough to take out the knights or the coffin chick. I had underestimated them—those knights were probably on the same level as my classmates, and they had good equipment too. And that babe… I didn't stand a chance. Not against that sexy body. Not against her firm, toned amber legs, her plump, thick thighs, or her narrow waist and smooth stomach—no teenage boy stood a flicking, throbbing, thumping chance! She was on the level of Miss Armor Rep and Slimey! There was no way I could beat her!

But it looked like the church mages and knights were doing something to wield her power. Judging from the flow of her magic with Jupiter Eye, it was some sort of control skill. That's why they hadn't wanted to use her.

"Hey, stop!" I shouted. "I can't beat a Dungeon Emperor-class enemy! And if she gets out of control, it won't be just the frontier that's screwed, it'll be the whole continent! She'll ruin the Theocracy if she gets loose—you think *you* can stop her?! Why would you bring something so dangerous? Well, besides the lovely legs and exposed skin and entrancing outfit and alluring curves. In fact, I'm very, *very* grateful that you did, but still! You can't let her loose! Much as I'd love to see that."

The river had started to flow into the low basin that now contained former Murimuri Castle. Just as planned, it was flooding like a pond. Was this the time for a swimsuit joke? Well, speaking of swimsuits…the bikini-and-chains babe was still stuck in her coffin, being carted along by the advancing knights. *Sheesh, there are still fifty of 'em or more!* I really didn't want to have to fight. My only chance was a surprise attack.

"Brats these days aren't trained properly, are th—ow! Aaa! At least teach those urchins to bow their heads to servants of the church, marked with the very seal of God! My goodness—*yowch!*—to think that this spoiled frontier is so backwater that they disrespect the holiness of God, those filthy heretiii—ACK!"

“Nasty bastards. I guess this is what you get for being believers of that old god dude? A bunch of old dudes with a perverted old god fetish can’t really be saved. They were already pretty ugly and stupid and then they layered that old god dude’s teachings on top of that? Yikes. Teach your people a little sense before you teach ’em to love that bald-and-bearded bastard, ’kay? You worms. How can you call something *God* when it lets these nasty life forms infest the world? Those creatures have to be their maker’s responsibility—this creator guy deserves jail time!”

They were a buncha hoodlums draped in fancy armor. Some nice hoodies would have been useful, but I had no use for hoodlums. Best to wipe ’em out nstead. *I just need to kill them before they take the seal off that babe*… Then I’ll get hold of her somehow and use Demolish. Worst-case scenario, it’s like a nuclear reaction, but even that wouldn’t take her out. I’m pretty great at getting hold of babes, that’s my favorite activity! *I’ll gladly accept this task!*

“Gwaaah, he dares befoul the name of God?! Graaaah, we’ll need to torture and reform his twisted mind before sending him to his divine punishme—wehwehweh—nt! Gyaaaah?!”

“Gyaaah, my ass! It’s pretty ballsy to blame your own choices on heaven? If you really believed in divine punishment, then you’d just sit there and pray, you know? Whatever happened then would have to be an act of god. When you do it yourself, it’s just an atrocity. Why’s it our fault that we don’t believe exactly what you do? If it’s written in the teachings that the old god dude committed mass atrocities, then it’s his fault, I guess… Anyway, if god really did exist, then all of the tragedies in the world would be god’s fault, and a god who doesn’t take responsibility can’t really be called a god? So god is dead. If he’s alive, I’ll kill him. You guys are just a bunch of old-dude fetishists, mass murderers, and completely creepy perverts. So die. Seriously?”

I couldn’t stop the dungeon Deluges anymore. Not with that girl around. I wouldn’t have enough MP left to even keep myself alive. All I could do was take out these knights now and I’d figure out what to do with the girl after. Not that there seemed to be any solution, but I’d love to do things with a hot babe like her, so I’d give it my all! *So first…*

“Old dude fetishists, straight to the white room with you. You can screw your bald god all you want, there.”

“Don’t speak down to us, you infideeeeee—*AAAAAAAHHH!*”

I went full throttle and they all dropped dead (with the exception of the girl, who stayed right where she was, chains and all). I activated Magic Entanglement to force Teleport, Gravity, Demolish, and Holding to do what I wanted, then unleashed my full strength. I didn’t even try to save my MP—I released an all-out rain of blows with Universe Staff. Magic rippled, twisted, and thrashed out of the staff. Yup, I knew what was coming this time—who would have thought I’d be aware of anything? *Septuple Slash.* I only had two swords, the Dimension Blade and the Heavenly Sword of Gathering Clouds, but I added some stabs with the divine spear Mistilteinn.

I dashed fifty meters in one step, then cut them down with my swift strokes. I poured all of my MP into inter-dimensional attacks beyond control or comprehension.

I cut everything in my wake, even rocks on the mountains near the pseudo-dungeon over three miles away. The church must’ve thought they were invincible with their flashy equipped effects, Slash-Proof, Physical Weakening, Magic Reflection and all that.

“Yeah, I cut between *dimensions?* I cut apart space-time with God’s Sword—of course I can hit through immunities!”

But now I had depleted my magic, and my consciousness was fading in and out. My body, muscles, and even my bones hurt. My body hadn’t been spared from all the cutting. Aside from the extreme pain, at least I was awake?

“Wait, I don’t want my consciousness! It hurts! Wait—I do. I can’t faint now. Ouch?”

The knights were all cut in two, but the coffin was completely unscratched. Great, now I was short two trump cards, out of magic, and full of holes.

My body was too ragged and torn to even move, so I activated Blockhead to move forward one step. Keeping my bones and muscles together with Holding, I took another. Using General Health to deceive my

blood vessels into staying intact, I took another, and finally reached the coffin…as my body fell apart all over again.

At least Miss Armor Rep and Slimey could fight together, although even the two of them combined could lose to this. They might die. My classmates didn't stand a chance. They couldn't even lay a scratch on her.

They all could die—so I took another step. I didn't have any MP to force my body together anymore. I had to risk it all on God's Sword. *So just one more step, please, get me one more step?*

"Well, I can't make it. I won't…but… Huh?"

My arm, which was supposed to be holding God's Sword, or the Universe Staff, wasn't there anymore. *Oh…* It fell off. I'd have to body-slam her. Not a bad way to go, crashing into a hot body like that. *So please, just give me one more step… No… I can't make it.*

"Curse you, you vile heretiiiii—oof! To defy us, the servants of God! Our mission is to destroy all of those who befoul the name of God! We are here to destroy you and all inhabitants of this corrupted frontier… Graaaagggh!"

I still gotta deal with these losers? Some of them were hiding behind a damn forcefield. I noticed the priest who was activating Control over the girl. I didn't have any strength to fight left, but this bozo was choosing *now* to unleash the power of the chained girl? He saw me, a ragged mess, lost arms, no equipment, blood spurting out of every hole in my body, and decided it was high time he showed himself. The head priest.

Then I saw it. A smoke signal. *They did it.* That made three white signals—the frontier army had made it in time. And three red—the church had officially started the Deluges.

When one man-made Deluge started, the monsters would pass by any cities or towns in between us and charge straight to the frontier. This was it, our final stand. I just needed that fourth smoke signal to go up.

But this was going to be trouble. If anyone tried to take on this girl, they'd die. Make the wrong move, and everyone dies. And if I died here, we'd lose Murimuri Castle. *This is bad.*

As I lay there, unable to move, my worst fear came true. There was a fourth red smoke signal.

We were done for. The frontier, everybody. *Oh no*. The old church dude had turned the tables on me. He sure looked happy. I really didn't want to see an old dude smiling. I didn't have enough cards left. I didn't have any left in my hand…or any hands, for that matter.

"…Wha—!"

The girl was approaching. She held two scimitars as she walked over. Her chains were gone. She must've been following the orders of the Head Priest's Control. She was gathering her magic. I noticed her cursed necklace, probably the origin of the Control spell.

I took a look with Jupiter Eye. "Obedience Necklace: Forces the wearer to obey any command." It *was* controlling her. But since they had her bound to the coffin and no one got too close, it must not have been fully reliable. With that level of terrifying MP pouring out of her, I could see why nobody got too close.

She was the Theocracy's final and ultimate weapon. *They took out their trump card…so I guess I'll take out mine? Since, y'know, I've got a bunch?* I ate one of those complete regeneration mushrooms and gobbled an MP regeneration mushroom too.

"Hey, even if I don't have trump cards, I do have lots of mushrooms. It's mushroom city over here!"

I used Magic Entanglement to walk over to the girl. My body wasn't fully healed, but at least I could walk. I had used all of my legitimate trump cards…which only left the illegitimate ones. I had them, not that I wanted them since they were banned for a reason and all, but I didn't have any choice. The lives of everyone in the frontier hung in the balance, so I had no other options left.

"The final price that I have to pay—my ultimate last resort—goodbye, my sex appeal!"

My body had recovered by this point but it still hurt. More specifically, my soul hurt. My spirit screamed. The agonized cries of my bloodied and abused sex appeal rang out for all to hear.

“It just hurts…this Nightmare Eyepatch is straight out of a middle school boy’s cringe-ass doodles. I mean, a black eyepatch with a pentagram drawn on it surrounded by chains…that would’ve been lame enough to knock me out, but no, it *also* has a gemstone inserted in the middle for the capital-C Cringe finisher!”

I had sealed it away and hidden it with all my might, but now I had to wear it on my own face. That was why this was a forbidden card, this “Nightmare Eyepatch. Resistance, Intelligence +50%. Spell Eye-strengthening (hyper). Sorcery. Hypnosis. Mesmerize. Puppetry. Memory Modification. Consciousness Control. Spirit Pollution.” The controlled girl, the head priest, and the remaining knights all stared at me, frozen.

This was a collection of church warriors; they were bound to be skilled at spirit attacks. They probably had some sort of countermeasure, and the Obedience Necklace on the girl was a beefy bit of equipment. I’d lose the Consciousness Control battle—the necklace resisted me too well on that front.

In that frozen fraction of a second, I went up to the girl and tied her up with my “Prometheus Chains: Binding. Perfect Skill Invincibility.” Yup, a heretic item on par with the Obedience Necklace, that one! I’d overwrite the controls on this chick. I mean, with a girl this beautiful just abandoned on the ground, how could I not pick her up? Finders, keepers. It was pretty depressing to have to resort to that, but now I had a pretty lovely lady in my possession, soooo…

"Urgh…"

"Hey, it's okay! As in, like, now you're getting your conscious mind controlled by a teenage boy. I nullified your Control spell by overwriting you with Prometheus Chains' Perfect Skill Invincibility. So…yeah, nothing is remotely, slightly, the least bit okay, but you can't worry about it, okay? Otherwise, I'll get false accusations I'll have to fight off with a sweet-ass sale, so don't worry about it. I mean, in this position, even if I tell you things are okay even though they're totally, seriously, hella-mega *not*, the worst thing is the damage this cringey outfit is doing to my sex appeal. I'll just make it so I can give you back to the old-dude fetishists over there, so just sit down and wait a sec, 'kay? Oh, here's some tea and sweets. You must be hungry, here's some lunch, so go ahead and eat up. I'll just put it there. Oh, and have another helping, but…just be aware of the obesity problem around here. That's not okay either. I'll BRB. Ya know?"

Nod nod?

Did that mean we were cool? She tentatively nibbled on the crêpe, which had to mean it was okay…more or less. I must've seemed so pathetic, always talking to myself. *Can't anyone around me give me a response?* I supposed her mouth was full, so she shouldn't respond. She was having trouble moving, so I removed the Prometheus Chains, sealed them, and pushed them into the darkest depths of my item bag. I knew this wasn't going to be the end of the massive, tectonic, catastrophic, eruptive sex appeal problems for yours truly, but I had to deal with the god-dude fetishists first.

"What did you—?!"

Should've expected this from top-class church items—they were managing to resist my Nightmare Eyepatch. *Maybe I'll remove their equipment?* I certainly didn't want to deal with old-dude nudity, but their items looked pretty nice and they might come in handy. A red smoke signal had gone up, so the Deluge was due to start in about an hour. I took off all their equipment and grabbed any money that fell out in the process. I mean, it was on the ground, so that meant anyone could have it.

"You insolent… Who do you think you *aaaaaarrrgh*!!!"

Without their equipment to protect them, they fell into Puppetry under Consciousness Control in an instant. *Ugh. What's the point in using this on old dudes?!* Screw that! I didn't have much time, and I could just leave them be now that they were harmless, although given the hell they were gonna put us all through that felt super unsatisfying. I ordered them to tear out each other's hair. *Go bald and rot!*

If I didn't hurry, I knew I'd see a black smoke signal go up too. Those marked the start of the Deluge. Everyone could retreat back to here now. We just had to defeat four entire dungeons in less than an hour. *Body, please move properly? Ugh, I just need more time!*

DAY 72

BEFORE DAWN

I just escaped from old dude hell, so of course I'm going to ignore any old dudes.

THIRD DUNGEON

OUTSIDE

THE GROUND SHOOK. The air vibrated with the shrieks of monsters. The Deluge was here; it crashed over us, wave after wave. A mouth had opened up straight from hell to swallow the world, and it was baring its fangs at us. *But we're here to stop it!*

"Invite the monsters in, then corner and crush them! Front lines, draw them in and stay in formation—side squads, jump in for the kill!"

"The Deluge is in a brief lull. Fourth wave counterattack!"

"All injured, withdraw, swap positions with the front! There are still more than enough monsters—no one can afford to die!"

"Yes, my lord!"

Dungeon monsters were formidable enough on their own, but in a Deluge, there were too many to count. Every shape, size and strength of monster all rushed forward at once, making it impossible to hone one unified strategy to handle all of them. All we could do was push back against the stampede. Soon the floor guardians and the dungeon boss would enter the fray, and we would be in hell.

Yet we shall persist! The hopes and dreams of the frontier rested on our shoulders. Our ancestors fought against obliteration despite a painful present and a tragic past. We had no right to claim anything was impossible now. *We shall achieve anything!* Our present and future were filled with joy. We had put an end to the tragic frontier, and it was time to live the future of our dreams.

We'll never let these monsters get to the frontier! I wanted to take out all the monsters at the dungeon entrance, if possible. The Deluge seemed to be targeted at a specific destination, so I doubted the monsters would scatter. Between that entrance and the Deluge's target lay villages full of innocent people. Nallogi lacked both its duke and army now. There was no one left to protect its people.

"Reorganization complete!"

"Squad two, returned to formation!"

"We've finished healing. Healing squad is heading back!"

"Stand by until the next lull in the battle!" I commanded.

"Yes, my lord!"

My army came ready to die in a fight where we couldn't spare a single body. These Deluge monsters were extraordinarily powerful, posessing enough force to cause a continent-wide calamity. But we were strong too. Our troops were intelligent and well-trained, not to mention experienced. *Yes—the might of the frontier army shall prevail!* We possessed skill-equipped weapons from the ancient Ultimate Dungeon, and defensive equipment packed with useful skills.

More skills, more speed, more strength. We could easily slay hordes of monsters. The frontier army, previously poor and with no recourse beasts but to flee from these beasts, now wielded the terrifying weaponry necessary to overcome them. This was the power we had long needed to defend our people. With this might, we could hold out until the Deluge was finished. And yet the reports grew worse and worse.

"Are you sure?" I asked. "Absolutely certain?!"

"Yes. It's a regiment of knights of the church numbering about 3,000. Our surveillance says they have top-class equipment. Church-trained as well."

That spelled our doom. It was a miracle we'd made it this far. That the monstrous destructive force pouring forth from this dungeon met its end at our hands—unbelievable. The glorious power possessed by our weapons could slay monster after monster, bear attack after attack without falling.

House Omui had fought against Deluges for generation after generation without success—but now we had the power to truly protect our people.

"Can we send out a squadron? Merely slowing them will be enough."

Countless weapons of destructive force. The boy gave this top-class monster-slaying equipment to us in what he called "bargain sales" and "rip-offs" out of his boundless generosity.

"We don't have any spare soldiers, my lord."

"All of our offensive units are on the front lines!"

Our armor was so strong that it hadn't failed a single one of us in this protracted battle. Up until now, we hadn't even been able to procure proper metal, forcing us to scavenge pig metal to make weapons and armor for the domain—but now that boy had given full-body armor to our entire force, armor that might surpass all else in the entire kingdom. They were a marvel of engineering and craftsmanship. *If we fall like mere monsters now, how will I ever look him in the eye?!*

"We're up against knights of the church—we won't be able to stop them even if we divided up our force."

The Shino clan supported us from the rear. The boy still couldn't remember their name and called them Stalker Girl's clan; should he commit their name to memory before my own, I would bear no grudge. Thanks to them, our hopeless frontier army now had sharp eyes and ears to spy on the enemy.

I received intel from them and adjusted our strategy on the fly. We only stood a chance thanks to the Shino clan. They didn't have military strength, but they had a supply of medicine and mushrooms from the boy to distribute among our ranks. When floor bosses or dense crowds of monsters appeared, they supported us with the boy's hand-made spellstone grenades. They seemed conflicted to see that the battle had arrived in Nallogi, but they took pride in their prowess. *They are the treasure of the frontier,* I thought. *We couldn't have asked for a better ally.*

We'd been cut off from behind. The Theocracy army attacked again, and with knights of the church at that. They were a group of vicious killers who hunted down heretics on behalf of the church—and they had come for

us. They must've made it through the border before the First Royal Division reestablished itself. They had arrived at the worst possible time.

"The Shino clan says they will take on the knights. There is no need to mobilize the army."

"Stop them!" I shouted. "Have they gone mad? They'll go straight to their deaths! Tell them the boy would not want that!"

At this rate, the knights would attack from behind. They would either target us or the black-haired girls' squadron. The only reinforcements we had were the Imperial Guard. But even Her Majesty the Princess's force would be futile against them. The enemy had the best possible equipment, forged from the riches of the church's monopoly over spellstone crafting. These powerful creations of the frontier blacksmith would not be enough. While the Imperial Guard had the best equipment in the kingdom, it was several stages below even ours. A battle would be a quagmire.

"I doubt they will even make it in time."

We were caught between the knights and the Deluge. If we couldn't retreat, then at least we could drag the knights into the path of the monsters.

"Princess Shalliceres and her Imperial Guard are on their way," my advisor said. "Unfortunately, they won't be here soon enough. Let us retreat to the frontier."

"What a disgrace it would be to retreat from the Deluge, and the fourth and final one at that. At the fort, the boy faces 40,000 soldiers alone. The boys' allies take on two Deluges by themselves—you mean to say that we must retreat from a single one?"

If the civil conflict between those idiot princes hadn't decimated the Third Royal Division, the kingdom would still have 30,000 soldiers to spare. Instead, they had turned on us, and now a mere few thousand knights could force us to betray the people of Diorelle? Must we retreat?

"Duke Omui, you are the ruler of the frontier. I understand that you want to protect the people of the kingdom, but retreat, please. For the sake of the frontier."

"A meager force of 3,000… If a mere thousand of those are elite warriors, then we should be able to launch an offensive and take out their

leader. Even if all three thousand are elite! Three battalions of a thousand—that must be doable."

"It is *not!* Please, my lord, retreat! You promised Lord Haruka you would. Are you going to break your vow to the savior of the frontier?"

I paused. "Blast. Begin preparations for withdrawal. And hurry!"

I wanted to at least shave away at their numbers a bit more as that would reduce the number of victims. But quitting too late could prove disastrous. We needed to begin preparations to retreat right away.

"Report, my lord. Princess Shalliceres is leading a rapid assault against the knights of the church, leaving their force in tatters. She now makes her way toward the fourth dungeon!"

A rapid assault! The Imperial Guard had managed to mobilize despite the short window of time. But to cover such a vast distance…the only possible explanation was that the boy had provided the princess some sort of item. If the elite Imperial Guard warriors could take the enemy on, then we could fight on their level.

Normally, the higher your level rose, the less high-class equipment served to enhance you. A high-level warrior that was actually enhanced by top-class equipment… *That is the definition of a superlative warrior.*

"Excellent! Halt the retreat. If we fall now, the Imperial Guard will laugh in our faces. Let the princess take the fourth Deluge!"

"Yes, my lord!"

A fifth dungeon Deluge had begun. The boy predicted a minimum of three, likely five. Seven was a possibility. The absolute worst-case scenario was *nine*. The Shino family had uncovered nine dungeons tampered with by the church, but only five of them had an active church presence. We lacked the forces to take on a fifth one. No—that was incorrect. Originally, the kingdom didn't have the forces to defeat even a single dungeon Deluge. It was a miracle that we could even hold the line against three, let alone four. *And yet, I wish for the ability to tackle one more.*

"A floor boss has appeared!"

"Here it comes! Make way!"

At such a crucial time? I shouldered the responsibility for the lives of my troops, for the safety of my people. *Life is difficult.* My heart leapt in my throat; the thrill of battle possessed me. My whole body started to tremble uncontrollably as I gathered my equipment and readied my sword to face down the floor boss. An enemy stronger than myself. I had the weapons—I would face it. Throbbing shivers raced down my body from head to toe.

"Force it back towards the dungeon!" I bellowed. "Charge!"

"CHAAAAAAAARGE!"

After all those failed and hopeless battles, I finally realized something. We could never win because I was trying too hard to protect everyone. Recently, I learned a crucial lesson: to risk my life, to withstand the fear and fight back. *Since when did we forget what it took to win in war?*

Since ancient times, the Omuis fought against monsters, eventually driving them all the way back to the frontier. Just when they had cornered the monsters, prepared to extinguish them from the very continent—we had been betrayed. Heroes fell, and that marked the legend's end. Our betrayer was none other than the church. Countless heroes fell to the goddess of the Ultimate Dungeon, and thus the power to extinguish monsters from the continent vanished from the land. Since then, the history of the domain became drenched in tragedy—lost battle after last battle, a story of a vain struggle in a world without heroes.

"Today, we fight," I roared. "We have the means now. Just like the legends of old, those heroes who fought back for generation after generation!"

"Yes, my lord!"

Resignation had been etched into our hearts by a history of failure and devastation. At some point, we succumbed to learned helplessness. We had accepted a future of defeat because victory was impossible.
We couldn't even bear to sacrifice to achieve our goals. The monsters simply continued to brutalize us, and the ranks of the dead grew.

In our hearts, we had given up. We accepted our extinction. We couldn't even fight back because any attempt was bound for failure. Our

hearts—our very spirits—had been broken. We had given up.

Today was different. Neither the frontier army nor the Imperial Guard wavered in the slightest. *We* would destroy! We would be the ones to rampage and extinguish and brutalize. That thought consumed us all.

We had all seen it. The boy killed 10,000 monsters himself, and destroyed whole dungeons on his own. *Impossible* was no longer an excuse. He showed us it was possible, and gave us the weapons to achieve it.

"The elite forces led by the Sword Queen are worthy to be called heroes, but not us!"

"The troops have seen the boy at work as well. He expanded what they thought was possible… Now, they shall reach for it themselves. That is the true tale of a hero."

We'd lived in a world where hopelessness was the law of reality. Where everyone had given up on their lives. Those same people had come to qualify as heroes.

I knew that the boy didn't want anyone to die. He rejected anything approaching thanks or praise. Still, he defended the domain against tens of thousands alone. We had no excuses. We would not give up. It was our turn to reach for it—the strength of that boy, the dreams of happiness he had showed us.

"Surround the dungeon king! All soldiers—*charge*!"

"CHAAAAAAAAAAARGE!"

Someday, I would teach him my name. Defeating a dungeon Deluge was far easier, and so it would have to come first. *We must crush this Deluge, and we shall!* I vowed. *Die, foul beasts!*

DAY 72

DAWN

New way of lancing a boil: "If a sword doesn't work, just use a dog's fang."

SEVENTH DUNGEON

OUTSIDE

EVERYONE TRUSTED US, and we failed. We were granted the honor of managing the information network. We, the Shino clan: once employed by the traitor Nallogi domain, we'd been recognized by Duke Omui himself as a treasure of the frontier. Even the princess of Diorelle asked for our help.

Fulfilling the clan's long-cherished hope, we gave the task our all as we sent up the smoke signals. We hadn't come close to repaying our obligation yet. Despite all of this trust they placed in us, we failed.

Everyone needed us. Haruka-san even gave us priceless spellstone hand grenades. We needed to succeed at all costs. How could we have failed?

We had plenty on watch. Our communication channels were stable. What we hadn't counted on: yet another Deluge.

Perhaps we'd focused on the idea of five Deluges and let our guard down. It was going terribly wrong. All I could feel was regret. *But what does regret do for us now?*

"Quickly, send up a new smoke signal! We need to notify everyone, even if it's late!"

"At once!"

Now we had to secure an escape route. Duke Omui had forgiven our treachery and assigned us this essential task. The princess had gone beyond our dearest hopes. Beyond simply calling on our aid, she showered us in praise. And then there were the black-haired girls who'd always treated us with kindness. All of them would end up cornered and overwhelmed.

Meanwhile, our greatest benefactor, Haruka-san, fought alone against the terrors of the Theocracy. *He* would be cut off from all aid. *We can't let that happen!*

"Two red smoke signals!"

"Final confirmation. Red and black. There's no doubt… It's another Deluge."

A fatal mistake—we had overlooked two of them. It was our failure and our responsibility. Duke Omui called us the "Eyes of the Frontier."

Haruka-san granted us powerful weapons and equipment, saying, "Information's a weapon. Leave the fighting to the muscle heads, 'kay? It's dangerous so here's some weapons and equipment! And some brand new spellstone grenades. Just don't tell Class Rep you got so many."

We had betrayed their trust. They had placed their lives in the hands of the traitorous Shino clan, and we lived up to our reputation. This was our fault.

"Gather the spellstone flash-bomb ailment-inflicting grenades!" I called. "I… I'll stop this Deluge myself! Everyone else, converge with Lady Angelica and the girls' group—they should be nearby—and retreat with them to the frontier. That is an order. Please!"

"M-my lady!"

"You'll find my father over there," I said. "Duke Omui and the princess's forces can also retreat. There's no time. Hurry!"

"…Yes, my lady."

The dungeon shook, and the entrance shimmered like a smoke signal. Any moment, monsters would come pouring out and the Deluge would begin. All I could do was hurl the spellstone grenades that Haruka-san made for us until my arm fell off.

He gave them to us because he trusted us. We had to throw them and delay the Deluge, even if only for a few moments. *I think I really might lose my arm!* Haruka-san had given us incredibly powerful weapons… I gathered the flash grenades and stationed myself at the base of a hill. *If these grenades do take my arm off, at least the monsters will die first!*

The moment I saw movement, I began chucking grenades. A blinding flash of light and a massive boom—spellstone flash-bomb ailment-inflicting hand grenades were devastating defensive weapons, and these were designed by Sir Haruka himself. When I threw them, there was a burst of light followed by an explosive blast. They left the monsters unable to battle and frozen in place with various status ailments. They were soon trampled by the waves of monsters behind them, only for the next grenade I tossed to erupt anew and paralyze the next group of monsters in a flash. *Are these really just for self-defense?*

"I suppose there's no such thing as too much self-protection against a Deluge… These might be enough to save everyone!"

These could save the frontier. They could even save the poster girl back at the inn. My arm hurt. I could barely breathe. The endless blasts, explosions, and screams of the monsters reverberated in the thick air. The monsters never stopped coming, no matter how many grenades I threw. *So this is a dungeon,* I thought. *This is what the frontier has been up against.*

I lost all sense of time along with all feeling in my arm. Soon, I lost my sense of hearing. My eyes started to glaze over. My arm grew heavy and my fingernails tore off to the quick. *I'm starting to lose it.*

But I had to throw every last grenade. Haruka-san gave me them, after all.

He had given us a ton of them. More than a ton, really. We, the traitors of the domain, had received an unbelievable weapon to protect ourselves with; the people of that duchy had all placed their trust in us. And that wasn't the only thing they'd fed us! All of the delicious meals, all of the sweet desserts, all the delectable snacks… Laughter… Sir Haruka had given us everything! I would never let them go to waste—I'd use every last one of these grenades to protect everyone and then perish if I had to. I knew he would forgive us for failing, but I couldn't forgive myself. After experiencing so much happiness—receiving so much care—I could never forgive myself for not being able to protect it.

I could barely see and couldn't hear. I kept throwing grenades instinctually. I didn't even know if I was tossing them in the right direction anymore. If I let my guard down, I'd collapse. In fact, I had no way of knowing if I hadn't already.

Functionally deaf and half-blinded, I remembered the feeling of Haruka-san petting me on the head for some reason. *I guess I'll never see him again.*

I felt around for more grenades and gathered them up. The mountain of grenades had been reduced to just a few more. The mound of monster corpses and the thick, adhesive gore they bled out was starting to obstruct the dungeon's exit. I could sense a new chaos brewing—the deranged, status-effect-addled monsters were attacking one another now that they were suddenly cramped in close.

Had anyone gotten away? Did I do enough? *I'm so tired. I can barely see.*

But I still had spellstone grenades left. And there were still more monsters coming.

Screams resounded, bellows shook the air. Without my senses, I had almost nothing to guide my hands as I threw.

I had no idea how much time passed, but there were only three spellstone grenades left. Just how many had I thrown? My hands and arms were completely numb. I was tired beyond belief. Three more. Then it would all be over.

Every time I was on the verge of giving up, I thought about how desperately I wanted Haruka-san to pat my head again. I remembered how surprised I was when he first did it, but it made me so happy.

Never again. Just three more spellstone grenades. And they were having no effect on the Dungeon King.

I knew that Father was holding back the sixth dungeon Deluge. Had everyone escaped? *Can I finally give up?*

I summoned the last of my strength and threw the final three grenades at once, but they weren't enough. I had given it my all. I did everything I possibly could.

And now, Haruka-san, please pat my head one last time. I tried my best, so I deserved a reward.

"I gave everything," I muttered. "So please…Haruka-san, pat my head. Goodbye… Huh?"

I didn't get pet.

Instead, the monsters got whacked. I wanted to protest the injustice.

The gigantic wolf Dungeon King was cowering and whining. All the surrounded dogs and wolves started to yelp and writhe in pain. In the middle of the writhing wolves stood Haruka-san, pinching his nose.

Not fair. A sour smell suffused the air. I couldn't even move my hands to pinch my own nose. But there stood Sir Haruka, holding his own!

"Yo. Been a sec—as in centuries—since I've seen a living creature besides old dudes, so I was gonna be all hyped up to see you. Why are you on the verge of death and stuff? You get some acne or something? Tellin' ya, it's not hygienic to pop your pimples with doggy fangs. Same with orc swords! Why're you tryin' to get all bit up by doggos, anyhow? Pretty doggone ridiculous if you ask me! The dog days are over, remember? Getting bit by dogs in the head, that's gonna hurt! Probably even more than getting bit by the Mean Girls… No, no, they're definitely crazier. They wouldn't start whimpering, they'd whale on you instead! Geddit? Like *wail*? The kobolds are way more terrified of them than the other way around, you know. Not that I've asked them, I'm just guessin'! Give a guy a break!" he said as he patted me on the head.

It was Sir Haruka. It was always *going* to be Haruka. Now, I was crying. I couldn't control myself.

Eventually, he gave me a potion, and my sight came back. It was like a dance of carnage before me. The wolves fell one after another as death swayed through their midst; a bewitching dancer cut through them all, leaving murder and madness at every step.

The girl sliced the enormous stampede of monsters rushing out of the dungeon into tiny little pieces. She chopped them up and their flesh and blood floated like tiny petals of tragedy in the wind. A beautiful goddess of death frolicked among the horde, whirling up a silver storm—a twirling sword that struck down monster after monster after monster. Hers was a deranged dance that obliterated vast numbers of monsters.

Her blade drew the arc of a helix, cutting monsters apart at every curve, scattering them to pieces as they raged at her, then fell without even touching her.

She was beautiful. Her deathly dance was cold and sublime. Countless silver chains swung from her body as she danced, as she swung her dual scimitars. The destruction of the dungeon monsters became a beautiful performance as the Deluge charged at her, almost as if they welcomed their own demise. *She's strong… Who is she?*

"Heeeey, dancing girl. I mean, Dancer Girl? I'm supposed to be controlling you, so why're you demanding compensation in the form of sweets? Forget all the necklaces and sexy outfits, what you really want is crêpes? I guess this is stuff is easy for you, so…just take care of it and stuff okay? Another old dude is throwing his arm off at the other dungeon, he's probably in trouble, that bomber old dude. Oh god, not more bomber old dudes! Maybe I can set them on each other and eliminate the old dudes—I mean, the monsters…but I guess I'll go give him a hand? And stuff?"

"No…more…crêpes?"

That was the situation. He was going to go rescue my father, who was surely still holding his own at the site of another Deluge.

Somehow, the two of them were massacring and cutting apart the monsters from a massive scale dungeon Deluge as they negotiated payment in *crêpes*. I knew Sir Haruka was strong, but this girl was crazy! As she went on demanding desserts, she swung and twitched her right arm in a subtle arc, and the silver chains than hung from her shot out to slaughter the oncoming monsters. *Neither of them is even looking!* They eventually settled on five additional crêpes, debating toppings and debilitating monsters.

She was a dancer in a revealing, sultry outfit draped with silver chains. The outfit exposed her stomach, shoulders, and legs. Calling her beautiful wouldn't do her justice. She had a glorious, womanly body beyond anything I had ever seen. And she was throwing a tantrum about crêpes.

I felt something grab the scruff of my neck, and next thing I knew, I was up in the sky. This cruel, savage world looked so beautiful from far

above.

DAY 72

MORNING

I'm just not allowed to have anything in this world, am I?

6TH DUNGEON

OUTSIDE

H*OUSTON, we have an idiot.* Just how many imbeciles had I seen since coming to this world? *Well, I knew five of them since before coming here.* The rest of them I met right here in this fantasy world. He lost his right hand, had a hole in his side, and his left leg was severed at the knee. The old idiot clutched onto a spear to hold himself upright as he continued throwing spellstone hand grenades.

What an idiot! Ah, *what* an idiot. Stupid! That was the head of Stalker Girl's clan, Stalker Girl's dad, whose name was… Uh… He didn't have one. Which was fine with me, 'cause he was an old dude.

"Yoooo, geezer? Stalker Geezer? Hey, gravity is gonna pull you down to the ground and stuff so brace yourself, 'kay? You're gonna fall at the speed of sound, so by the time you hear it you'll already be on the ground—"

Ker-bonk!

Stalker Girl used Gravity magic to erase the gravitational force, and I used Holding to lessen the impact. I was pretty sure he was okay… Yeah, his eyes and mouth were wide open. Fortunately, you could easily fit a mushroom in there, so he'd be fine soon enough.

Catastrophe—the monsters had already gotten out of the dungeon—the one I'd just crash landed in front of. But instead of breaking my ankles, I just whacked at the ground with the Universe Staff, which still made for an uncomfortable landing. Yeah, there was a giant crater where the monsters used to be. Yup, a giant hole in front of the dungeon. The monsters went tumbling down into the crater… *Guess I better sprinkle some poison mushroom dust down in there just to be safe?*

Gyaaaaagh!!!

"Yikes, they're wriggling and writhing and stuff. I really could do without old dudes and monsters writhing around in my life? Yeah, that seriously bums me out!"

I provided Dancer Girl Babe with her crêpes, so she was happily fighting the monsters at the seventh dungeon by herself. She was on par with Miss Armor Rep and Slimey, so anyone concerned should be concerned about the other guy. The dungeons outside of the frontier were close by, but generally pretty low level. There was no way a Dungeon Emperor could even lay a finger on her. But if anyone so much as scratched her seductive skin, I'd have my revenge!

"If she does get hurt, then I'll have no choice but to rub the healing mushroom ointment into her skin?! Yes, I would have no choice, no choice but to rub with both hands. *I shall rub!"*

Princess Girl was taking on the fourth dungeon, slaying the monsters alongside her loyal Imperial Guard. That was the first Deluge to break loose. I do mean slaying, by the way. To protect the people and their pride, they faced off against a Dullahan holding its own head. So much of their pride was at stake that I decided not to interfere.

At the same time, Stalker Girl was busy being an idiot at the seventh dungeon, tearing her own nails out and giving herself internal bleeding. Her small hands wobbled as she lifted up and hurled one spellstone grenade after another. She barely had the strength to throw, so she crawled on all fours toward the dungeon entrance as the blasts rocked her body, dousing her in monster blood. Even so, she continued to throw.

"I'm sick and tired of all these idiots!"

Yeah, I was pissed, so I gave her a good ol' whack, and then I shoved a mushroom in her mouth. *That'll make her better.*

"Think about how Poster Girl will feel if you get injured! She'll cry! A lot! And Slimey will get upset so all the girls will get mad and lecture me! Can you please be more considerate of my circumstances? *Thank you very much?!*"

Right now, father and daughter were knocked out with mushrooms in their mouths. Whatevs. I'd stopped keeping track of what was going on.

Since I didn't understand the situation, I could just kill the monsters however I wanted. It didn't matter. With five Deluges already happening, we'd let our guard down for the sixth and seventh. The eighth and nineth dungeons were further away, so who knows what was happening there? They were out of the range of Stalker Girl's clan.

For now, this was number six. I could think about the rest later. At least, I wish it were that easy. I always seemed to figure things out too late, but I usually covered up that flaw by destroying the evidence. Killing every last monster in sight seemed to usually fix things more or less, and if I turned them into spellstones, then yippie ki-yay. Right?

Without holding back, I used Magic Entanglement, imbued myself with every last gaudy skill I had up my sleeve, and sprang into action. There was no point in worrying about my own health. The monsters fell into little pieces; I leapt through them, slashing them from behind as they charged forward. I didn't understand what my body was doing myself, so no questions, class.

"Hai-yah! Get bonked and perish! And stuff!"

Monsters kept pouring out of the ground. As I kept doing something or other to kill them, the something-or-other monster corpses piled higher and higher. I'm sure the monsters didn't understand what was going on either. It's pretty tough to fight when you're clueless, you know.

"The dork inside of me is kinda digging this self-made (incomprehensible) style (murder). Never thought I'd be a first-class fantasy fighter!"

The monsters shrieked as I cut them apart and sent them tumbling to the ground. It was pretty easy to cut yourself on whatever the hell I was doing, I can tell you that.

"Thank goodness there's a hole. I thought I was gonna need to run around to chase 'em down."

That was where I'd landed. A deep, deep hole.

"Don't think I could handle having to chase around monsters after chasing around so many old dudes," I said. "I should've just had the old dudes chase the monsters around!"

Wasn't that the point of the frontier army? They were supposed to protect the people.

"This has nothing to ding-dang-do with me! If there was a Babe Deluge, I'd volunteer to be chased, and in fact might have to do some chasing myself… Actually, is there somewhere I can do that? This world has a serious babe shortage… *Ahem,* babe-spawning event flag please?"

I felt sore. Since I was low on MP, I wanted to save up if I could, but that meant I had to rely on the Universe Staff. I *whack-whack-whomp*ed away at the monsters as they emerged from the hole.

"I guess fantasy worlds are all about whacking monsters, but I've still got a ways to go before becoming a monster master."

Maybe the monsters were all just waiting for the monster revolution. Too bad they'd go extinct first.

Just when I thought that I was almost done here, I saw two red smoke signals go up. Then two black smoke signals. That meant more Dungeon Deluges. *This fantasy world is going to be a pain in my ass to the very end!*

"What's even the point, man?"

The nerdlords wouldn't make it in time. I suppose they did what they had to do—what they themselves decided they needed to do. But it meant they wouldn't make it today.

So…that must be why they shot fireworks in our direction?

"Fireworks! Err…fiery…works? Yup, there goes a particularly round one!"

With Clairvoyant, I saw a sea of monsters burst out of the two remaining dungeons. These were the eighth and ninth church-made dungeon Deluges. They charged out, rampaging towards the frontier. They spread out wide, making it impossible for an army to handle their numbers. But…one could simply eat them instead? Apparently?

Jiggle jiggle!

Fireworks exploded across the sky. Individual, round, jiggly balls burst. Then, an endless horde of replicated feasters endlessly ate across the never-ending monster field!

“Does Slimey have preferences? The slimes seem to be avoiding certain flocks.”

I supposed the nerds realized they wouldn’t make it on time and came up with something. The meatheads certainly weren’t the ones who’d thought of this. And so they made something…what the heck was it called? Probably a long-range slime cannon. They shot Slimey, who used Divide in midair and rained down from the sky… Looked like these two Deluges would be ending in a tasty feast.

Jigglejigglejigglejiggle!!!!

Not sure what Slimey ate back there in the Beast Jungle, but now, a vast herd of replicated slimes covered the field. This was the end of the Deluge, for sure. The slimes danced joyfully as they gobbled up the monsters. Slimey could end the entire world if he wanted to. Heck, he could probably *eat* the damn world.

“I was worried about having enough ingredients for him! Can’t beat a monster buffet, I guess.”

I observed the situation with Jupiter Eye’s Clairvoyant—AKA, I checked things out while continuing my own whomping. It was all good. The Slimes were bouncing around like pinballs and would probably chow down on the floor bosses and Dungeon King sooner or later. Slimey was doing just fine. *We may have a Dungeon King bullying crisis on our hands, if anything!*

Meanwhile, Miss Armor Rep handled Deluge number one. That was the biggest and deepest—the Dungeon King there would be facing the Dungeon Emperor. So…yeah, we were good.

My classmates were facing off against the second dungeon. They were saving their strength while wiping out the monsters. As long as they followed Class Rep’s orders, they were in control.

The frontier army was doing their best against dungeon number three. Err… Well, they were supposed to just hold down the fort, but instead they were charging in at full speed and destroying as many monsters as they could. *I’ll pretend I didn’t see that.*

Princess Girl and her elite Imperial Guard were fighting number four along with Maid Girl. It was a tough battle, but they were steadily

advancing. Whenever a large monster appeared, Princess Girl or Maid Girl flew in and finished it with a swing of her sword.

I was in the middle of walloping number six. *Whackity-whompity-whump?* There were still monsters left, but it was a pretty shoddy dungeon overall.

Dealing with number seven was something on another level altogether. Dancer Girl was like Miss Armor Rep, so limitlessly powerful there was no point contemplating her abilities. That kind of babe would be the worst possible enemy, so thank god I had two of them on my side. If I had to face off against the two of them, I might stick my face out a little too far and face various rubbing and squeezing and face-burying things. Things so powerful they'd take my face straight off! My teenage boyhood would go on an uncontrollable rampage in an unstoppable Deluge of horniness!

Numbers eight and nine were currently getting feasted on. Endless jiggling and never-ending eating. We'd cut this battle pretty darn close. I was spent. I'd expended every last trump card I had.

And yet we still had a red-and-black smoke signal coming from numero cinco. That dungeon was the closest to Murimuri Castle. As impregnable as Murimuri Castle was, it was currently unmanned. I had nobody left, so I had no more plans. Had I failed anyway?

DAY 72

AFTERNOON

You don't need to write down the lessons from that historical battle for people to remember.

MURIMURI CASTLE

THE PSEUDO-DUNGEON was in ruins. All of its traps were destroyed. It no longer had the power to stop a Deluge. The gates guarding the frontier had fallen, and the stone golems and their stalwart defenses were overrun by sheer numbers. They were crushed and defeated, broken down until they could not revive themselves.

My last trick—a bomb planted in the pseudo-dungeon—erupted, scattering poisonous gas to inflict all sorts of status ailments. Even the Master Golems buried in the mountains, which operated the whole pseudo-dungeon, could not wipe out the sheer overwhelming numbers from the Deluge. They dealt huge damage and cut the enemy's numbers, but not enough. Even the final explosion couldn't stop the hordes.

All that remained was the impregnable Murimuri Castle. A bellow rose up outside of its walls. The herds of monsters began their assault on the frontier. They blasted open the unmanned gates—and a final counterattack hit them.

It was the very portrait of hell; the extinguishing of the great Deluge unleashed to destroy the frontier. The monsters died in droves, screaming and writhing.

Even with no heroes to defend it, it was still *our* land—this land at the continent's farthest reaches, the untamed land of monsters. We who lived there, the children of the untold generations of those that survived there, were the heroes who managed to fight back in this frontier dominated by monsters. Since when were we weaklings who needed to be protected? Were we not the descendants of those mighty heroes who had survived in this cursed land, who gave birth to children and raised families?

Only the strong survive. The weak are weeded out. That was the cruel reality of the frontier. How could we allow ourselves to be seen as weak? Everyone in the frontier was descended from heroes. Every one of their ancestors was a hero who'd managed to survive long enough to give birth to them and protect them. *What do we have to fear from outside monsters?!*

"These are the beasts that our mothers and fathers have trampled for untold generations! *Continue their legacy!*"

"Raaaaaahhhhhh!!!"

They banded together. They lost everything, and rose up again. That is why the people of the frontier survived. That was their strength. They *were* strong.

One day, a miracle occurred here. Everyone started to dream. Vain, fragile dreams, but they allowed us to smile again. We found happiness, but how much blood had been spilled to get us to that point?

The people used to live without happiness. We survived for so long. Not falling to calamity, battling against unbeatable monsters, living in the midst of inescapable fear. Finally, we grasped it—happiness. We started to laugh.

As if we'll ever let go of that!

Why did we have to be weaklings who had everything we held dear constantly stolen from us? If we gave up, we'd lose everything. We'd never give up until the frontier found lasting happiness. We'd make the frontier's dreams come true. To think we would abandon that responsibility! To think we would deny the frontier's dreams!

And then the boy appeared to return all of our stolen hopes to us. To think we would give up now… If we did, the frontier would lose its very right to dream.

"They may call us the demon realm. They may call it the edge of the world. But we will not let the monsters have this land, the very land that our ancestors protected!" I bellowed.

The people of the frontier now carried the legacy of the countless lives who'd sacrificed themselves for our current happiness.

“Don’t let the boy fight alone! He has no army, so we will be his! If there are no heroes, we’ll become them! Murimuri Castle, named after I, Murimour Sim Omui, shall not fall! *Do not let them pass! Destroy the monsters in the name of the frontier!”*

“Raaaaaaaaahhhhhh!!!”

The adventurers of the guild, the village and city watchmen; hunters, old men who had retired from the military; men, women, children—everyone who could fight had gathered.

Monsters had been extinguished from this so-called demon realm, allowing us to live in happiness. We would gladly defend that with our own blood, flesh, pain, and suffering. How could we live with ourselves after surrendering our domain to monsters from the outside? Not in a million years!

“Adventurers, go after the floor bosses and Dungeon King. Common soldiers, destroy the rest!”

The frontier would lose its meaning if we did not fight for our own. We would *always* protect our own.

“Beat the monsters to a pulp with the clubs we have been given! Every last thing they’ve tried to steal from you—beat it out of them!”

“Raaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh!!!”

The loss of the pseudo-dungeon was a great blow. We would greet the monsters’ onslaught deep in the marsh, take the brunt of the enemy charge, crowd them together, and stop them. Then, all we had to do was kill them all.

“All units, to arms! Destroy them! Turn those fiends into a smorgasbord of spellstones!”

“Chaaaaaarge!!!”

Who would’ve thought that an unstoppable stampede of fiends would be snuffed out by a mob of rampaging housewives? I, a princess knight descended from glory, Murimour the Brutal, donned armor over my dress. I carved a path of blood with my great sword from where I stood at the head of the vanguard. The housewives, swinging their clubs behind me, left a muddy bog of monsters in their wake. We stomped the monsters beneath

our boots, buried them in blows, and turned them into spellstones we would use to buy heaps of treats.

One day, future generations would learn the origins of their grandmothers' hidden wealth. The boy once called our city a war zone. We had left a new one blazing behind us.

Thanks to him, we wielded equipment fit for the task. The club-wielding housewives charged through the fiends, exterminating them and blasting them to dust. These were the champions of the frontier's fierce bargain sales after all, valiant champions who did battle day after day. Monsters from outside of the frontier were no match for champions from within.

And thus the kingdom's war drew to a close. When future generations read the history of this battle, their only reaction would be *Our moms sure are scary!*

DAY 72

NIGHT

The fortress was cursed by the evil old dude spirits.

NEO-MURIMURI CASTLE

EVERYONE SANG AND DANCED. The war was over. Peace had come. The frontier had won. And so…

"Feast time!" the cries arose.

"Wooohooo!"

Jiggle jiggle!

Drink and song, accompanied by a chorus of "Make more sweets!" It was a feisty frenzied frolic of a feast.

"More fried chicken, 'kay? Mayo too, yeah?"

"But no lemon juice!"

"I nabbed a major mound of skewers! Major Skewer, reporting for duty!"

"Kabayaki! Skewered eel! Oh my goodnesssss!!!"

Jiggle jiggle?!

We all knew the chef behind this incredible feast. *Still, get us more french fries, 'kay? And a healthy serving of ketchup too!*

This feast of feasts featured a throng of beautiful women feasting fervently as could be. The gorgeous Angelica-san, with her incomparably lovely, entrancing face, slurped up soba noodles. Next up was an otherworldly Cleopatra-esque beauty of a woman, even more beautiful than I'd imagined from her description. She was glamorous and charming…and also in the middle of viciously attacking a bowl of katsu on rice.

Haruka-kun, the only non-beautiful face in their midst, was her *owner.*

Stalker Girl, who was a witness to the affair, sighed. “It was amazing. She danced like a dream, scattering monsters everywhere.”

All Haruka-kun could add was “It was hot!”

She was powerful enough to captivate Stalker Girl, who had witnessed the fight between Haruka-kun and Angelica-san. And now, she was using that unimaginable power to muscle in on the skewer war and chomp down on as many as she could get her hands on.

This girl had a bob with bangs, which only enhanced her beautiful features. This incredibly enchanting character was now, for some reason, hiding her allure inside a Japanese school tracksuit—and stuffing her mouth with manju.

“Cheers!”

“CHEERS!!!” everyone shouted.

The fifth dungeon Deluge, which should’ve been the end of us, had made it all the way to Murimuri Castle. But it stopped there—the people of the frontier defeated it. *Moms are terrifying in fantasy worlds too!*

They had gone completely without any information for a few days while Duke Omui was absent. Still, they fell back to the fortress. Despite all odds, they managed to seize happiness with their own hands. They protected their domain. Who could blame us for celebrating that?

“Delicious!”

“This is the cuisine of the black-haired country, you know!”

“*Sooo* damn good!”

Wiggle wiggle!

“What’s got Slimey looking so smug?”

All of the clubs Haruka-kun gave them had powerful effects. They were strong enough to rank as special-class weapons in Diorelle. Each mom had prismatic spellstone-coated clothing sourced from his various bargain sales, strong enough to nullify magic attacks and keep them safe even against frontier monsters. It was all extremely OP…for anywhere outside of Omui, anyway.

The housewives were unbeatable, naturally. The monsters may have broken through the last defenses of the pseudo-dungeon, but that didn't mean the shoddy foreign Deluge stood a chance against those housewives. *They were trained in way fiercer battles (bargains)!* They'd managed to defend the frontier in the end. And the pseudo-dungeon, which exploded in a fury to defend the frontier until its very foundation collapsed… It fulfilled its role masterfully, and now it was gone. *Yup, last time I checked it's been remade into a new pseudo-dungeon?*

All the injuries were minor and easily healed with some mushrooms. It had been such a hopeless fight, and yet there were no casualties!

Angelica-san took on the largest and most dangerous dungeon of the bunch without any issue. "It was fun. I feel good," she said with a smile.

Did she just treat the Deluge as mere amusement? *Must be the bad influence of her owner!* Speaking of which, a lack of seconds (and thirds, and fifths) from said owner were causing quite a stir.

"It's so good! I need more!"

Jiggle jiggle!

Duke Omui and the princess looked exhausted but satisfied. They were finally able to relax now. They'd had to exude strength and confidence before, and they'd done so admirably.

Meanwhile, Stalker Girl and her father looked despondent as everyone lectured them. It was inevitable—they may have saved the frontier, but that wouldn't mean we'd accept them risking their lives like that. We fought so that nobody would die. Haruka-kun ran around arranging the battle like this to avoid that outcome. They deserved a little lecture.

Haruka-kun was saying he'd miscalculated: he hadn't anticipated that the Theocracy's ultimate weapon would be that beautiful girl, or that she'd possessed the Underworld skill. He was so assertive about it that I couldn't help but to get suspicious, but he hid his account of what happened behind such nonsense that I had no choice but to believe him. He wouldn't tell us about it if it were truly a fatal mistake, anyhow. He *couldn't*, not in any way that made sense. So if Haruka-kun said it was fine now, I would believe him.

"Cheers, everyone!"

“More food!”

Boink boink!

The culprit himself had a perfect attendance score and no remorse for his past crimes, seeing how he’d busied himself with cooking and endlessly muttering his complaints. He cranked out his own deluge of luxurious, sophisticated dishes to topple the stomachs of the heroes who toppled the monsters. *I think the whole frontier is gonna need one more set!*

“I…ate too much…”

“My stomach hurts. But the food was so good!”

What about the no-show dungeons? Well, Slimey made it in time to devour two of those. Apparently, long-range slime bullet feasting was involved… Was that some sort of skill? Ever since coming back, Slimey stayed right by Haruka-kun’s side, jiggling around and clinging to him.

“Slimey really gave it his all today.”

“Haruka-kun gave him a ton of healing mushrooms, but he still hasn’t totally recovered.”

“Wow. Great job, Slimey.”

It took us a long time to beat our dungeon, but we managed to finish it off with no damage and energy to spare. We bonked some fleeing nobles and took them captive on our way back. *Time to crack down on manju monopolies around here!* It was tough to let them go without a punishment, but they would get their proper judgment in the capital, so we just bonked them and left it at that. *They better hope that manju-fueled resentment doesn’t get the better of us!*

“Pheeew. It’s finally over.”

“Thanks, everyone.”

“We really did it.”

Haruka-kun had apparently entered his typical whack-a-mole mania to deal with any monsters that crossed his path. With a completely disinterested expression, he explained what happened. He had always been like that, to be fair. I could tell that he would be fine.

It had taken me until now to accept that, though. After spending two straight months together, I finally understood him. He was a mess. His body was battered and his nerves were frayed; his muscles and bones were barely hanging together. Here he was, throwing together a mountain of food for us and acting like nothing happened, when he had been on the verge of death. He pretended he was totally fine when he was the furthest possible thing from that in reality. Haruka-kun didn't want us to worry by saying how much it hurt. He didn't want to make us sad by saying how much he suffered.

He smiled and complained as he pretended things were fine. So, I smiled too—we all did, for his sake. Our smiles were why he nearly sacrificed himself after all. We smiled for his sake.

"That was incredible!"

"Ugh, I ate way too much!" *Sob.*

"Saaame!" *Weep.*

If he did all that just so that we could smile, then we'd happily give him his reward. We all tried our best to get hyped up and have a good time. We'd prove our happiness to him. *Well, I guess we're a little sad from overeating? But nothing one more circuit can't fix.*

"No, you don't get it! I tried shutting myself in, but the old dudes overran the place with their old-dude stench so I had to move my shut-in location 'cause they smelled so bad?! Of course, I wasn't gonna use Shut-In *there!* Man, 40,000 undead old dudes forever? I *had* to move, that place is gettin' burned and buried for the rest of eternity!"

"Wh-what exactly happened in this fight?!"

Yup—when we got back to the frontier, something *felt* different. It turned out that the criminal mastermind had buried another fortress underground to bring up when he needed it. He was more indecisive about where to shut himself inside than a hermit crab. *How many times is he going to change his temporary housing?* This shut-in whipped up spare houses all over the kingdom, and was even excited to turn literal dungeons into luxury apartments. He was a brand-new type of travelling, cosmopolitan shut-in! A very rare, globe-trotting shut-in, and completely self-unaware. *He just can't sit still, huh?*

“And since when was there a bamboo forest…?”

“He made Neo-Murimuri Castle to win a battle, so why did he install a gaudy recreation room, salon, and countless massage chairs?”

“He said he almost ran out of magic doing it… But *that’s* the reason why?!”

“Definitely. He stuffed it full of plenty of fancy artwork too.”

It went without saying, considering who made it, but the new fort had a bath that eclipsed our wildest imaginations. *He made this while fighting 40,000 soldiers?!*

“Cheers to Omui!!!” everyone shouted.

The soldiers, the adventurers, and the villagers all smiled and laughed, enjoying the feast. They’d defended the happiness of Omui, after all. They defended their domain. Behind the walls of Murimuri Castle, a happy frontier survived. They’d preserved a future for the people there, and the right to have faith it would arrive. They were joyful from the bottoms of their hearts.

“Duke Omui can’t stop crying, huh?”

“People keep making toasts for him. I think he’s drunk.”

This miracle happened only because of all the preparations we had in place. We were able to defeat the most powerful organization on the continent thanks to Haruka-kun’s preparations. He had worked so hard for everyone’s happiness and future. *And fancy baths?*

“We only got away with no casualties because of the mushrooms Haruka-kun has been selling throughout the domain.”

“Haruka-kun waged a mushroom war, didn’t he?”

Everyone could truly relax *because* everyone had survived. The Omuis were having a lover’s quarrel at the moment, but they were on the verge of tears of joy, nevertheless. When the duke found out that Lady Murimour had come to the front lines to fight, he criticized her for being reckless. Then Haruka-kun let slip that Duke Omui had led a charge right into the heart of the monsters, so yup, now they were yelling at each other…

“Cheers to the Shino clan!”

“Praise to the frontier army!”

Jiggle jiggle!

Everyone celebrated, singing one another’s praises, holding each other tight and weeping. Haruka-kun was running around with Incarnate to escape the embraces of the elderly men and women. *It’s pretty bad manners to leave your footprints on the walls and ceilings though.* He was in pretty good shape for having wounds all over his body.

“He really toyed with us,” Vice Rep A sighed.

“He’s been toying with this whole banquet.”

“Don’t resent him! All of this was only possible because of him!” the other girls shouted.

Haruka-kun was the only one stewing in regret now. The results were perfect, but he was upset about how his plans fell short. The whole frontier might have been destroyed if Duke Omui’s army hadn’t gotten there in time, if the princess and her troops hadn’t joined the fight, if that mysterious beauty hadn’t appeared and helped him, if Stalker Girl and her father hadn’t put their lives on the line, if Oda-kun’s group hadn’t invented a slime cannon, if the adventurers and the villagers didn’t join the fight…and if the Theocracy had just one more card up their sleeve. If chance hadn’t saved us, he would’ve been defeated. Everything went well by sheer coincidence, and that was tantamount to failure in Haruka-kun’s eyes. *That silly boy.*

“*He* was the one who made all those coincidences possible,” said Fish Girl.

“Yeah!” said Shield Girl. “We only won because Haruka-kun did all the prep.”

They were right—the one who made all of this happen was the possibility-smashing, unrelenting, happiness-upon-the-world-enforcing villain himself. Failing was impossible as long as he was around. Being unhappy was impossible. *That’s how we got here.*

So long as the chances didn’t drop to zero, Haruka-kun could win. He worked so hard to make sure that our chances never hit zero. We should’ve

just been happy about it. It would be unforgivable to not be happy after everything he did for us. *At least…he looks happy?*

"Mrrrrrmfffgh! Stalker Girl, why didn't you give me a heads-up about this teenage-girl Deluge? W-wait, you're participating in it too?!"

"Why did only Shield Girl get a push-up bra?!" the girls were shouting.

"W-well, her bra has an airbag function, and they can't inflate when there's nothing inside to protec—aaaaaarghhh!"

"You think these are *nothing*?!"

"And only the arts club got thongs! Not fair!"

"Y-you see, that's just a masturbatory mistake, misplaced misinformation, I swear! I swear on my teenage boyhood!"

Even with the world at the brink of destruction…he couldn't do anything to stop the final outbreak of a teenage girl stampede. *Looks like he has a zero percent chance of rescuing himself from this one.*

He schemed a way to defeat nine dungeon Deluges at once, but now he was happy to die in the throng of a teenage-girl Deluge. His face looked happy, so I supposed he was happy. *And I'm joining the stampede myself, huh?* We had taken our armor off, so now we were swarming him in a mass of lightly clothed bodies. *Time to rest, Haruka-kun*. He was a happy corpse now. We were all so worried about him.

After that, we all went to the bath for a girls' sesh.

"Oh my god! She's *so* gorgeous! I'm jealous!"

Yup, the mystery girl followed us to the bath. She was hitting it off with Angelica-san, or I guess it was more like she was a fan of Angelica-san? For some reason she was excited to shake her hand.

"Yummy, food and sweets, Servitude!" she said.

"Oh no. She's begging to be enslaved!"

Even though her arms were long and slender, she had thick amber thighs that glistened in the bath's water. Had Haruka-kun already managed to win over this calm, mysterious beauty? Yeah—she was ready to join the

crêpe fan-squad and everything. *Hang on, could the manju fan-squad be outnumbered now?!*

"What toned, soft, smooth, graceful, muscular might!" cooed Shalliceres-san.

"Shalliceres-san is already washing her!" the girls cried.

"After spending all day acting the gallant princess general too!"

That beautiful girl with a face resembling Queen Cleopatra was named Nefertiri. Nefertiri-san had illustrious titles: Immortal Mummy, Dancer, Divine Warrior, Holy Knight, Archsage, and Heretic Saint. She was happily letting Shalliceres-san wash and rub her back.

"H-her body…"

"She's rivaling Angelica-san's one-more-set charms!"

"How is her waist so narrow?!"

Nefertiri-san was already getting a flood of requests for personal training. *I think I need to join!*

"Her narrow waist emphasizes her perky butt!"

"She manages to balance muscle and grace so elegantly!"

"Her body is just out of this world!"

Could Haruka-kun safely make it through the night? I was already detecting a dangerous expression on Angelica-san's face. The two were already scheming some devilish Deluge of delights…something so fierce that Nefertiri-san seemed *very* intent on joining Angelica-san as Haruka-kun's slave. Haruka-kun didn't stand a chance. He was done for.

"A threesome with those two…he's ridiculously outnumbered!"

"Definitely a lot more dangerous than one boy against 40,000 'old dudes.'"

"I'm second lover, first wife. Thank you," Nefertiri-san said to Angelica-san.

"First wife… Is this polygamy?!"

Apparently, she was the same type of creature as Angelica-san. Haruka-kun had rescued her, just like he had Angelica-san. She had spent

her life forced to wear the Obedience Necklace by the church, chained inside of a dark, cramped coffin. Now she was finally freed, finally able to act on her own. So she begged—begged for Haruka-kun to kill her. She asked, over and over.

She chose the wrong person to ask.

Haruka-kun would never go through with such a thing. No matter how many times you asked him, he'd never grant that wish. He refused to accept despair. He selfishly, nonsensically, outrageously rejected sense everywhere he went! There was no way in hell he'd accept that wish. That would've been way too sad! He blew her horrible would-be tragedy to bits. *That is the doom that he inevitably brings.*

He saved Nefertiri-san. He gave her a mountain of delicious foods and sweets like she had never seen before. He even brainwashed her: "If you keep living, you can eat all of this and you'll find so much happiness. Even if you don't find it, you can always just steal it, or whatever."

Yup, that did it.

His reeducation of Nefertiri-san was so powerful that Servitude wasn't even necessary—all the promises of food clinched it. It was only natural that she'd follow him after he led her out of the depths of despair. Despite all of that, she was currently freaking out and asking for advice from Slimey, who jiggled and wiggled in response.

To be precise, she was worried about not getting any orders. The church had forced her to obey their commands no matter what, leaving her terrified of killing more people. Instead of orders, Haruka-kun simply asked her to help finish off three crêpes. "I'm kinda running low on hands after that Deluge situation, so I could really use some help. So just eat what you want as a reward, yeah?"

She'd been rescued from a master she could absolutely not defy, from the shackles that kept her in chains. She'd begged Haruka-kun. She'd desperately pleaded with him to tell her what to do. He refused to give her any orders. Now, she trusted him. And in the end, she got five crêpes. *That's some impressive charm to get him to add two more.*

Angelica-san and Slimey didn't need food or sleep. They could supposedly survive off of magic. Despite that, they certainly ate to their

hearts' content. Nefertiri-san had never eaten a meal in her life before now. She didn't need food.

Haruka-kun not only taught her about food, but gave her mountains of the most delicious delicacies he had without asking for anything in return. He just told her to enjoy the food and left her without any orders, then went to capture the church's chief priests. He hadn't even recovered from all that fighting. It was a given that she would get attached to him. *He gave her strawberry crêpes!*

It must've been a shock to her. The rest of us were just like, *Uh, again?* None of Haruka-kun's servants had ever gotten a single order from him, after all. His servants begged him for food, bargained for sweets, got mad at him…but they never received orders, not even once. Slaves without orders. That was why they trusted him. Incidentally, Shimazaki-san and her friends were always in their birthday lingerie in the hopes of getting orders —but they never, ever got any.

"He did it again!" the girls groaned.

"He hasn't matured in the slightest!"

I figured she was anxiously asking Slimey what she should do. *Oh, it's too late for you, hon*. Haruka-kun spread like an epidemic from the frontier to all over the kingdom. No one was ever going to give up once he infected them. *So yeah, too late?* We all followed him. He taught us to never give up, so we would all follow him, forever.

DAY 72

NIGHT

Words cannot express true sadness. Only tears can.

NEO-MURIMURI CASTLE

I HAD A JIGGLING, juicy petting sesh in the bath for the first time in ages. With Slimey, of course.

Wiggle wiggle!

Slimey was thrilled to finally take bath again. Slimey and I were debating what to do with that amber-legged sex-goddess babe. I hadn't actually used Servitude on her, so she didn't get her level reset. She was still level 100.

Now that Slimey was back along with Miss Armor Rep, it was impossible for me to lose. Even with a level disadvantage, Miss Armor Rep had crazy cheat gear. She was tired, but Slimey was refreshed and stronger than ever. What's more, he had a buttload of new skills after his latest feeding sesh. Yeah, that new babe was dangerous. *But I can't kill her.*

"Yeah… She wanted to die, but I kinda just brought her along. I mean, she's so hot!"

Jiggle jiggle.

She had her free will snatched away and was forced to suffer under the church's commands her whole life. It would be wrong to end that without letting her experience anything nice first.

"They say that pleasure and pain are two sides of the same coin, but she's only ever landed on tails. Putting aside the fact that I'd be more than thrilled to participate in giving her heavenly pleasure, don't you think she ought to experience some freedom?"

Jiggle jiggle!

She was just like Miss Armor Rep. Her whole body had been restrained with powerful magic. She struggled against it. They put on that

necklace, which they used to even control her mind, but she still fought back. Anyone else would have lost their mind from the pain. *Believe me—I know all about getting entangled in magic.*

Yet she fought back. I understood why she wanted her torment to end. After bearing such a painful burden, all alone in the world. Even though she was trapped in a coffin in eternal solitude, she survived it, even resisted it. She was just like Miss Armor Rep. I didn't want her to die.

Now she was free. Yes, she was so ridiculously powerful that you'd have to at least wonder if setting her loose was a good idea. I mean, I tried to take an objective look at her personality to make sure it was safe to free her… But for some reason, Slimey was opposed.

Wiggle wiggle!

"I can't use Servitude on an ally," I protested. "I can't toss around Servitude like you toss around wiggles, Slimey. Remember, I'll free you whenever you want—we'll be together either way, you know? I'd really prefer not to rob anyone of their freedom like that."

Kyaboing!

"Huh? Kyaboing means you're *super* disagreeing! That wouldn't make any sense at all from you, Slimey. We're all gonna be best friends even without Servitude, you know. So just jiggle in agreement, okay? I guess we're not going anywhere anytime soon, so there's no need to rush into anything except into her gorgeous seductive body… No! No, I can't take that too fast either! Ya know?"

Jiggle jiggle!

Well, Slimey seemed to like her. She was a good girl, and maybe Slimey vibed with how happily she crammed food into her mouth. She ate with so much force that I may have to get her a meathead bucket…

After a cornucopia of constructive and complex discussions, we cobbled together various compromises and conclusions and met on common ground. Bath time over.

At least we'd tackled the biggest challenge in the world. Now, our sense of conclusion had finally…concluded. 'Cause it wasn't over yet! Well, it was over, for sure, but a new and terrible challenge awaited me.

“How *dare* you stop production as a bra manufacturer!”

“This is discrimination! Blatant discrimination against the modest girls!”

Jiggle jiggle?

Yup—fantasy world problems of various (bra) sizes still remained! Vice Rep A and C were totally pissed. They blew their tops off at me.

“You made bras for every single girl *except us!”* Vice Rep A shouted.

“Er, well, you don’t need them, right?”

“Yes, we do! We dooo!” cried Vice Rep C.

“We *seriously* do!”

Boink boink!

I didn’t think protesting any more would get me anywhere, but their boobs definitely hadn’t caused them any problems in battle. There wasn’t anything *to* cause problems. In fact, you could say that they were safer this way because there was less volume to target—no, well, you could *not* say that. Nothing, nothing! Ah, they’d borrowed some morning stars. *They’re so prepared… Just how many morning stars do they have in stock?* The kingdom should be terrified!

“Just from a pure physics perspective, it’s not possible to cover something with no surface area or suspend something that has no weight. Maybe you’d be better off asking a philosopher?”

“There is very much a surface area! And a weight!”

“I *have* boobs! They exist! I swear!!!”

“Even if they did exist in theory, I can’t use a curved surface to cover a flat object—mmmmmrrrfgh!”

“*They’re NOT FLAT!”*

“They’re just delicate! Delicate and modest, you know!”

Wiggle wiggle?

I doubt that delicate, modest individuals would swing at me with morning stars? Fortunately, I had put on full equipment when I got out of

the bath, so they couldn't injure me. But sheesh, that still hurt! *Those dole out fierce physical attacks!*

"I know that you're putting yourself out there just to make sure that we're all safe," said Vice Rep A. "But…we just want beautiful bras like all the other girls. I know they won't be as practical for us, but we were so excited to wait our turn. And you *did* make us go last!"

Hm, so I guess I was the bad guy here? They *did* see everyone else's bras, starting with Miss Armor Rep. They must've been sad about being left out, with the other girls showing off their ornate underthings… All the clothing in this world sure was miraculous! I should've realized. *I've been so childish!*

It made sense—they had been wounded by this constant, nagging difference between them and the other girls. I was impressed they hadn't gone full Mean Girl and tried to bite me.

"Okay, I get it and stuff?" I said. "Well, not the physics, but I do understand how you feel! Er, not the nonexistent boobs part, but the part about the increasing speed and rotation of those morning stars coming in my direction. I'll try making the bras, so please put those things away, okay? And don't stuff them down your shirts either! No fake protrusions today, and they're spikey as hell so that'll hurt if you try!"

"Neither of us are doing that!"

"Thank you!"

"And cut it with the 'nonexistent!'" they wailed.

Jiggle jiggle!

All of a sudden, I had to make two bras, but due to the spur-of-the-moment circumstances, Miss Blindfold Rep wasn't around.

"Why do I feel more comfortable that my supposed-blindfold isn't here this time? I mean, that so-called blindfold is more likely to force my eyes open than to employ any blindfolding ability at all!"

I didn't trust her in the slightest. You'd think that the girls would've issued some complaints on the so-called blindfold for being out of order, but no, they stuck it out, even though that blindfold deserved a complete

and total recall for consumer safety! That's why I was so much safer without her!

"That's a maiden's secret, you block-oaf-head!"

I whipped out my handmade blindfold which…had holes poked into it by Miss Armor Rep!

"Well, I call it a hole, but there's technically more hole than fabric on this so-called blindfold!"

Miss Blindfold Rep truly was the sworn enemy of blindfolds! I asked Slimey instead. Yup, this shapeless blob could indeed cover my eyes. Except…

"Uh, Slimey? You were black before. Don't turn transparent on me! I can see perfectly now! These feel like funky sci-fi goggles…but anyway, you're doing everything but actually block my vision? You're acting like VR goggles right now, 3D virtual reality, nearly powerful enough to turn completely flat objects into fully 3D—" *Ker-wham!* "—Waaagh!"

They whacked me.

“N-no, that was Slimey’s fault! I just got excited. Not that there’s anything to excite me here, nothing much… Er, never mind. I’m just emptying my mind to nothingness for bra production, obviously? Yup, nothing in my mind or on your bodies—” *Ber-fwump!*

They kicked me!

“Er, so I’m getting the shape going, as in made, and put it on…my new chest muscle enlargement support device? There we go?”

Whack!

Whump!

Kabang!

Ker-fwap!

“Agh—acts of violence! Censor this!”

“They’re *bras!* Not chest muscle enlargement support devices! They’re *braaaaaas! Waaagh!!!”* (Weeping.)

Huh? I was wrong?

“Chest muscle enlargement means push-up, you know? Like… enhancement?”

“Grrrr…then fine! We’ll take it!” (More weeping).

Yup, I knew it! They had desperately been trying to grow their breasts. It turns out a lot of stylish women’s clothing is designed for having breasts, so they didn’t sit right on their bodies. They really only needed the smallest, tiniest, most itty-bitty breasts to make it work, but they’d whack me if I said that aloud. They were already glaring at me with morning stars in hand!

“Okay, so now to push up…er, yes, the things that are very much there, up you go…and an air cushion for safety’s sake?” (Teary eyes.)

“…Yes please.” (Tears of gratitude.)

It was certainly true that they were lacking protection to reduce frontal impacts to the chest. These bras would make them safer, so that was fun. And they wanted to wear stylish dresses. Now, just maybe, the teenage

boys of the world might give them a second look. Yes, the frontal absorption deficiencies of teenage girls tended to have direct and powerful impacts on teenage boys. The two of them seemed happier now, at least.

On to the bottoms! In the case of Tiny Animal Girl, the, er, tiny animal butt needed a correctional shape-up belt function…as in, I wasn't sure how much support she needed. I didn't get any complaints about the tops, but then again, there was nothing to complain about there. Literally!

The bottoms had been a disaster. Why? Because Vice Rep A had the most dangerous bottom in the whole class! Her chest may have been modest and restrained, but everywhere below that was all-out supermodel-level curves! Her body (chest aside) was cool beauty personified!

"That was dangerous, but somehow I managed to resist the alluring long-leg sexy attack!"

Jiggle jiggle.

Yeah, I couldn't lie: my tentacles slipped a little and ended up doing a little bit of excess stroking, but we made it through. Well, I made it through —the other two fainted in astounded fits of "Eeeeep!" and "Aaaaaangh" in response to the precise, exquisite workings of Magic Hands. Miss Armor Rep returned after a while, but she left after seeing the situation with a suggestive, "Take your time." *What the hell was that about?! I have so many questions about her intentions*. Class Rep was a much more wholesome blindfold than Miss Armor Rep. No better in terms of coverage whatsoever, mind you.

"I mean, I need to move these bodies, so couldn't you help me out? They're passed out completely naked? Don't 'take your time' at me and run off! That's just going to result in false accusations of heinous crimes! Don't you feel guilty about the guilt you're shoving onto innocent ol' me?"

Seriously, what the hell was that? This on top of everything, man! Oh. I'd leveled up? Obviously Magic Hands had gotten stronger in multiple, strange, and subtle ways. They were way more powerful than before. I could tell by the girls' faces.

DAY 72

NIGHT

Anything beyond what's already maxed out is worth worrying about.

NEO-MURIMURI CASTLE

I WAS EXHAUSTED. Mainly mentally! You could say that energy itself is a key cause of many problems for healthy teenage boys. I put clothes on the naked girl and the Tiny Animal, and Miss Armor Rep came back to help move them. After that, I realized we had to talk about what to do with Dancer Girl.

"Dancer Girl only just got freed and everything, so I want her to relax for the time being. We don't need to rush into anything. I guess she *is* more powerful than Dungeon Emperor-class, though, so I should probably accept the responsibility for what I've unleashed upon the world. Especially the dangers of that enchanting figure! It's burned into my brain for all eternity!"

It would make the most sense to use Servitude on her, yeah, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. She'd just gained her freedom, after all. She deserved to live without any orders from anyone and be truly free.

"I'll just pretend like I didn't see them. Yeah, it's too upsetting otherwise? Mostly 'cause I don't want to, but even if I did, they defy my senses! I double don't wanna see 'em!"

Getting too used to seeing those would just confuse me. I couldn't drop my guard. The rest of my classmates checked their stats every day without any weird feelings—it was necessary for them, considering how rapidly they leveled up. Even though they came from a world without any levels or skills, they examined their stats regularly as if it was totally natural. People who were born in this world with stats had no reason to think there was anything weird about it either.

"Status."

NAME: Haruka RACE: Human

Lv: 23 Job: —

HP: 415 MP: 488

Vit: 358 Pow: 365 Spe: 490

Dex: 476 Mnd: 480 Int: 520

LUk: Max (Above Limit)

SP: 1528

COMBAT SKILLS: Peerless Cane Mastery Lv9, Avoid Lv7, Magic Entanglement Lv7, Life or Death Lv Max, Rapid Movement Lv9, Bend not Break Lv6, Eye Mastery Lv1, Diamond Fist Lv3, Random Fire Lv3

MAGIC: Demolish Lv2, Teleport Lv7, Gravity Lv7, Holding Lv7, Four Elements Sorcery Lv7, Wood Lv9, Lightning Lv9, Ice Lv9, Alchemy Lv6, Void Lv4

SKILLS: General Health LvMax, Sensitivity Lv9, Body Manipulation Lv9, Walking Mastery Lv8, Servitude Lv9, Presence Sensing Lv6, Magic Control Lv9, Presence Concealment Lv9, Stealth Lv9, Hiding LvMax, Insentience Lv8, Physical-Proof Lv4, MP Absorption Lv6, Revival Lv6, Supreme Thinking Lv7, Dash Lv8, Airwalk Lv9, Overclock Lv9, Jupiter Eye Lv5, Super Horny LvMax, Alpha Male LvMax

TITLES: Shut-In Lv8, NEET Lv8, Loner Lv8, Bane Sorcerer Lv5, Sword Master Lv4, Alchemist Lv6

ABILITIES: Corporate Proactiveness Lv9, Master of None Lv9, Blockhead Lv9

EQUIPMENT: Universe Staff, Clothes Set?, Leather Glove?, Leather Boots?, Cloak?, Jupiter Eye, Ring of the Destitute, Item Bag, Monster Bracelet Power+53% Speed+45%, Vitality+31%, Black Hat

Hey, what did you know! I gained two levels since I last checked, even with my slow, poor growth rate.

“I suppose I did get experience from taking out 40,000 low-level old dudes. Still, that’s only *six* levels since beating the Ultimate Dungeon!”

The last time I checked was back before I dug all the iron mines. In spite of all the dungeon battles since then, I hadn't grown a single level until this battle where I suddenly improved by two. It was possible that I was already close to leveling up from all of my prior experiences. The leveling-up process made me as uneasy as it ever had. Even if I could assume that it took longer to level up at intervals of five and ten, that shouldn't have anything to do with going from 21 to 23. Was the experience system weird, or was I being singled out? There were too many weird things to account for, but I could narrow things down. There was one new thing I *had* achieved.

"I couldn't control it because I never looked, huh? My Magic Hands were way, way too precise."

I supposed that anyone who looked at my stats would've seen one simple fact: that I was level 21. That's why the cherry-stem-twistin' old dude treated me that way. I felt like I had leveled up a lot more than that, but I never looked at my stats. Only I could see the full list of attributes.

"Sheesh. My skills and magic are stuffed full of mysteries from top to bottom. I was right to be suspicious all along!"

My list of skills changed every time I looked. I didn't really track what changed because that required checking. My status jumped around while I wasn't looking…and so those two levels snuck up on me. What a nightmare.

"So, I really can check my own skills. I suppose that's Supreme Thinking? The uncontrollable Random Fire had to get domesticated to break Dancer Girl's chains and all."

To hide my skills from myself, my status camouflaged and restrained them. When I realized I had Demolish, I lost my consciousness and got an uncontrollable nosebleed. Things should've been a lot worse.

My abilities already considerably passed my physical limitations. Unable to keep up with my skills, my body was constantly breaking down, which only accelerated as my skills powered up. That's why they got automatically hidden. Because today's fight was so close, some of my hidden abilities had been unleashed. That was why I was able to Teleport almost 200 feet straight into an enemy and wipe them out with Life or Death. It tore my muscles, shattered my bones, and caused my blood to

spurt and gush everywhere—I had unleashed too much reserve power. That was why my skills had to stay restrained.

"But how does Supreme Thinking get around that?"

Supreme Thinking came out of my prior skills High-Speed Thinking and Parallel Thinking, but "Thinking" skills weren't natural in this world.

I supposed there was no other way to manage the information about my massive volume of skills without breaking my Intelligence stat, so Supreme Thinking was born out of necessity. It was a means for calculating skill management. But who made Supreme Thinking, and who fed the skill all the information it needed. Who controlled it?

"Don't tell me it's you, Consultant! Giving me this skill for secret skill maneuvering without even consulting me first! Why I oughta… Don't you have anything to say to me?!"

Consulting Lv9 + Supreme Thinking Lv7 → Wisdom Lv1

There it was. Of course it stayed hidden until I went out of my way to find it!

Wisdom, huh? The relationship between knowledge and intelligence was complicated. With knowledge and intelligence but no new data to process, nothing happens. Intelligence and knowledge with no information was like an ultra-high-speed calculator that doesn't have any keys. It was only the combination of intelligence and information that worked—that was where you get wisdom. Essentially, a splendid AI supercomputer was helping me out from the sidelines.

This computer was hiding skills that would be dangerous to me if used. The problem was that it would be *more* dangerous for those skills to keep growing and end up even *less* usable for me.

"If Wisdom ends up frying my brain and my skills cause me to self-destruct… Well, it'd be fine if it only hurt me, but those skills could end up hurting others as well. And even if *my* brain fries, I have Revive—not that I like the idea of that. So yeah, I need you to hold strong for me, Wisdom. Stop hiding from me!"

I supposed it was saving me even when hidden, so I didn't have any right to complain. It should've been impossible for me to survive all of these other skills. There had to be something else besides Wisdom. I just hadn't found it yet. And everything else on top of that was, well…ugh.

"The only new skill listed now is Random Fire Lv3. So that's the mystery attack from before. An uncontrollable rampage attack converted itself into a skill?!"

Not only had it been turned into a skill, but it had already leveled up *twice*, making it even harder to control. Random Fire, created by using Magic Entanglement on an attack, could now be used combined *again* with Magic Entanglement. Double the chaos!

"Welp, now that you've shown yourself, Wisdom, I'll leave it to you!"

Wisdom was controlling those skills, after all. Fighting for an extended period of time was tougher than expected. My body was completely unable to handle the backlash and whiplash from accumulated skill use.

"I think my only option right now is to go dungeon spelunking and get some Vitality-boosting equipment. Losing my limbs hurts, and Class Rep always winds up getting mad at me afterward."

I kept physically breaking down because my bulk wasn't keeping up with my skills. That was what Body Strengthening was meant to help with, but my promoted version, Magic Entanglement, was the thing hurting me in the first place!

"Powering up Body Strengthening and Revival with Magic Entanglement breaks me—what kind of skill is that?! They're *my* skills, so they should destroy *my enemies*, not me! This is just absurd!"

I could figure out the rest later. I mean, I couldn't understand it right this second. I was exhausted, *and* I had a mountain of additional orders to get through. *Do I have to get punished every time I gain a new skill or something?!*

"And that church is crazy—crazy stupid, that is! They were ugly and obnoxious on top of being super old!"

They had to be screwed up in the head trying to use Dancer Girl even though they couldn't even control her! Their faces were plenty screwy too, so I guess their whole heads were screwed on wrong.

"Did they think they'd just be able to handle it if Dancer Girl turned on them? Does that mean they still have another weapon? Just judging by their faces, they're incredibly stupid, though…"

If they could cause artificial Deluges again, then we had to crush the rest of the frontier dungeons ASAP. But since the dungeons spawned naturally in the frontier, that power was a permanent threat. *The church hasn't caused every Deluge ever, though. It wasn't fully under their control.*

If the nerdlords came and met up with us, my classmates could probably take on two dungeons. The frontier army could make it about halfway down one dungeon. If Miss Armor Rep, Slimey, and I did one each, we could take out six more.

"The frontier dungeons are nasty, though. We could easily take down six kingdom dungeons, but if those had been from the frontier…the army would've been in bad, bad shape."

Even with all of my defensive measures and the massive explosion I rigged in the pseudo-dungeon, they were able to defeat the Master Golems and make it all the way to Murimuri Castle.

"I did invite them in, so it was inevitable to a certain extent. But those suicide-bomber dudes and the sexy babe were completely unexpected. I did make a killing by letting them in, after already getting stacks on stacks from the Merchant Kingdom. I increased our goods and equipment stock by a lot. It was all crap quality though, so…I guess I just gotta sell it?"

I had sold eel in the capital, and I also managed to sell the entire akazake stock. Oil came in handy as usual, but I couldn't use *that* oil in cooking. The frontier was already more developed than the rest of the kingdom. The kingdom's clothing, furniture, and equipment were low-quality and in low supply by comparison. I was at a loss about how many morning stars we flooded with market with, but they stopped being available, which was good. There were more than enough.

"The girls bought them all!" I cried. "Why do they need to have their own personal morning stars?! What are they after here?!"

Even if Wisdom activated automatically, I needed to test it out to understand its limits. So I tried activating Wisdom a…n…d…what… Whawhawhawhawhawhawhawhaisisis

DAY 72

MIDNIGHT

In the magical triangle between two sloping mountains, Nirvana itself is an erupting volcano.

NEO-MURIMURI CASTLE

WHEN I OPENED MY EYES, I saw beautiful faces on both sides of me? My mind felt blank… *What's happening? H-hang on!* A perfectly sculpted model-worthy face rested on my shoulder, her snow-white arms folded over her chest. Over her stomach lay two thick, bulging amber thighs. This was the most dangerous possible position for a teenage boy, witnessing two pairs of entrancing legs cross and caress one another… I was sandwiched in a stimulating, numbing, nubile, stark-naked sandwich of an obscene dream!

"Oh, they're still asleep…? Yes, I mean, this sight could only exist in an impossible dream, so I must be asleep too… That's the only possible explanation. Uh, why am I so turned on?"

My right arm was wrapped in between two marvelous mountains, and my hand was trapped under a bubble-licious booty. I was stuck, immobile, trapped in heaven itself. With my left arm stuck in two separate squishy mounds, I was locked in the most wonderful, perilous triangle this world had to offer.

"Sooo… I have no memory of how we got here? What is happening? And stuff?"

A naked hot girl on my left *and* on my right? Me, a naked teenage boy, in the middle? Talk about the checkmate of a lifetime!

"All right, let's see, I'm currently a traitor to the Asian race with a Caucasian and a Middle Eastern chick on either side. There's no easy answer for what species should be listed in my status, huh…although I should be focused on the harder challenge before me at this moment! And that problem is the teenage-boy problem! A challenge that eclipses the reason and instincts natural for my kind, a challenge with only one stipulated solution to these stimulating dangers! The plump thighs straddling and stroking my lower half—a challenge that has brought my veritable volcano to the brink of erect eruption. I mean, I don't think I've ever stood up so straight in my life?!"

This is bad! This is seriously bad!

But both of my arms were held tightly in place, rubbing against four soft, squishy, gentle piles of jiggle. With two beautiful faces sleeping on my shoulders, I couldn't make any movements—my upper half was completely locked in place. Below that, four legs were entangled around each other and mine, pinning me down completely. This full-body perilous predicament sent smooth, supple skin slipping against mine, a feeling that tipped between heaven and hell!

"Oh god, I've just entered the turbulence of the tortured teenage boy pre-eruption zone. And can someone tell me why a naked Dancer Girl is in my bed? Why is she wrapped around me, causing all this tumult and turbulence in the first place?!"

I felt nothing but pleasure. Soft, smooth skin rubbed against my body from both left and right, tangled all around me. *This is a devilish trap!* I mean, this trap was so perilous that I was pretty sure it'd trick the devil

himself into sexy times! Like, sexually charged sexual sex times? *I'm out of control!*

"I'm starting to experience a high-octane *rustle-rustle slither-slither* teenage-boy-style sexual harassment technique from a supposedly sleeping girl. This morning is way beyond *good*! It has to stoooop!"

There's no way those movements are accidental! I mean, they were moving in calculated unison to land a maximum sexual stimulation combo attack! They had me held in place. I couldn't dodge as waves of pleasurable attacks struck from the left and right, an attack that ended my brain function once and for all. *Th-they've completely beaten me!*

"You must ensnare me, enslave me!"

"B-but I promised myself I wouldn't touch you, Dancer Girl! And instead, you're the one touching m-me—Aahhhn—aagggh!!!"

These attacks… The battle that a teenage boy couldn't afford to lose had begun there, as in there, as in yes, as in…*there?*

"That rodeo-cowgirl ride melee warfare was a glorious two-on-one battle…but haven't Super Horny and Alpha Male hit max level? Even Revival has gotten all the way to level six, making nonstop, extended warfare totally possible. Like this?"

"Aaaaagh, eeeeeeek, mmmmm, ahhhhm, aaaagh!"

Thrusting, throbbing victory! I definitely would've been destroyed if Super Horny and Alpha Male hadn't been maxed out. Revival at level six was barely enough for them!

The solution was stored in my nearby cloak. With their four arms and legs locked around me in a continuous series of attacks, I just barely managed to snatch a potion from my cloak, turning the tables on them and readying my counterattack. With my cloak in reach, now I could no longer be defeated!

I had two enemies to face off against…so it was time to unleash the might of Magic Hands! I already had Vibration magic, but my new Wisdom's control over my tentacles was astounding—I could now easily grow a hundred and control them at will, sending hundreds of marvelous

sensations straight up my arms… Yup, I should've known a hundred was overboard. I looked down at their blissful, unconscious faces.

"They'll probs be fine once I pop some mushrooms in their mouths? Dancer Girl seemed to get a little pained, so I'll give her a mushroom just in case. Her mouth is already conveniently wide open? There ya go."

Next up, lecture time. After being thrown into such an entrancing, confounding battle, after being pressed and pushed and rubbed and rolled by those busty bodies, a disastrous defeated deadlock of doom…I was being treated like a delinquent? Blame my dewy-eyed innocent charm, why don't ya?

"I mean, there has to be a lecture, there is an order and procedure to these events—at least there usually is—so why couldn't they at least issue a teenage-boy warning for this war?! I mean, in teenage-boy terms I'm a teenage boy! And don't attack me! But thank you very much?"

Twitch-twitch…

I guess that counted as their response? Maybe I oughta tell them more sternly. I was getting a very strong sense that it was already way too late for me; I got to experience the most marvelous, magical miracle, sure, but there's *gotta* be a lecture coming!

"Why did you do this? I loved—well, I didn't dislike it, you know? I loved it as in…I couldn't necessarily deny the eventual events that proceeded, which culminated in the utmost pinnacle of delight. But I swear I'm mad! Dancer Girl is newly free, so we should slowly figure out what she wants to do. Why attack me like that? I cannot *thank* you or anything like that, no! We need to be having a serious conversation about what you want to do, *without* any ear-nibbling interruptions! Hey, why are you wrapping your legs around me again? N-no, I'm supposed to be *scolding* you right now, a scolding by the name of lecture, so properly listen to what I'm—n-no, don't *lick* me, *listen!* I'm lecturing you now, pointing my finger, you see! *No,* don't start sucking my finger like that! Whoa! Hey, what is this, judo—waaagh!"

Dungeon Empress rematch. It surely went without saying, but they had Vitality outta some different dimension. No matter how many times I knocked them out, they just came back—hang on, she's got Underworld, I've got Revival. *Does that mean she can always restore herself?!*

“H-hang on, if we’re equal in an extended match-up, then force of numbers will win in the end. That means I’m going to get totally mushed and tit-smashed and ass-smushed and brushed and husheeeed—*what triangle-combo madness is this?!*”

“Fait accompli, delicious food, contract guarantee! So tasty, so tasty, alone, I hate it!”

“Ack! I’m supposed to be a loner! Two-on-one is unfair!”

Since when did anti-loners entwine teenage boys like this? I was trapped on the bed, caught in a triangle of legs, tanned bulging thighs and long, slender pale legs, a triangle so fine you might call it sixty-nine!

“This position is nuts! As for what is nuts, let’s just say my nuts are going nuts, as in, er, never mind—*Sixty niiiiiine!*”

Libido league championship, rematch!

“Th-this is ridiculous. Sixty-nine is the finest way to wine and dine in my mind, so I’ve got a tongue-vibration magic technique to show you! Seven never eight nine, six did all along!”

“Aaaaaagh, uuuuugh, ooooooh!”

Our wrestling match went straight up Texas Cloverleaf, with tentacles and Vibration magic working in dreamlike combination to crush my opponents! Ladies and gentlemen, could this be—an inverse figure four?!

“Stay with me! Servitude! I want, happy!” Dancer Girl shouted.

“Okay, well, things aren’t perfectly peachy over here, either!” I cried. “Specifically my blood pressure!”

Top-half and bottom-half entanglement was bad news. And bottom-half entanglement was especially so for teenage boys!

My god, Dancer Girl’s stretching ability was absolutely unprecedented. *But this is exactly why Wisdom at last awakened! More tentacles, double ’em, two hundred or bust!*

“It goes to show how powerful their four legs are!”

“Magic power, turn off, Magic Hands!”

“Oh? Then how about I try out a Magic Hands Boston Crab move on you, huh?! W-wait, from behind? Being outnumbered here is such a

disadvantage!”

I kept their hands restrained and monitored their legs, but somehow —*her moooooouth?!*

This was a battle royale. It had gotten bright outside, but this wasn’t your average morning cartoon, kiddos. At this rate this body warfare was gonna give me new body vocabulary. Heck, forget that, I’d wind up with whole new body skills! The exhaustion was far outpacing my Revival rate. This battle was testing the sheer limits of my teenage boyhood.

I couldn’t let my persistence fade yet. I thought this was merely a full-fledged positional war that fully elaborated upon our transcendental mastery of flexibility, but these girls’ sheer energy was on a different plane! *Those are the eyes of a demon! She’s just starting to get serious!* Holy god! That position was insane!

“Together. Servitude. Forever,” Dancer Girl said.

“O…okay. Fine. I give up! I surrender!”

But my teenage boyhood had no regrets. This was going to use up every single last remaining ounce of my virile soul, ya know?

“H-hang on, I said I give up! You win! Okay, Servitude! Now, please! You’re enslaved now!”

“Now, you have me, forever.”

Look, as a teenage boy, I couldn’t necessarily deny the upside, but still…that was humiliating? I mean, teenage boys love looking at this sorta thing being done, but having it done to me…? I couldn’t take it. I gave up.

Smooch!

DAY 73

MORNING

I love ripping off and I hate getting ripped off, except at a suspicious store. Don't you think having teenage girls there is a serious crime?

NEO-MURIMURI CASTLE

NEFERTIRI-SAN COULDN'T STOP boasting about how she won—how she got officially enslaved. The defeated Haruka-kun looked haggard but relieved that it was over with. *Did she maim him?!*

"Hey, at least he gave in."

"I mean, she begged him with all her heart, entwining him with that terrifying dynamite—er, demonic body… No wonder he couldn't refuse."

"I can certainly understand that Haruka-kun didn't stand much of a chance against two-on-one in hardcore body combat."

He had certainly tried his best. All night, in fact. Which was why he looked dead tired this morning. Besides the all-night extreme body combat, it was a peaceful morning.

"Could you really call this peaceful?"

"Uhhh, maybe not, but, like… We crushed all our enemies, y'know? So, it like, checks out that we don't have to fight anymore?" said Vice Rep B.

"Yup, it's technically peace, but it's not peaceful at all!" everyone agreed.

The political and military situations weren't settled with either the Theocracy or the Merchant Kingdom. Negotiations to formally end the conflict hadn't even begun. Still, we were safe for the time being.

"I've heard that due to internal conflicts, the Merchant Kingdom has basically ceased functioning as a country," said Book Club President.

The Merchant Kingdom was technically more of a merchant alliance. With those merchants' fortunes having been plundered away and internal rifts widened, whatever bonds they had formed as a country were as good as shattered. Meanwhile, their elite forces and merchants had gone missing while on a slave-hunting mission to the Beast Kingdom, where they were robbed and beaten badly by mystery pirates. That left them with little fighting force to spare.

"And the Theocracy must've gotten totally ripped off, investing everything they had in spellstones like that."

The Theocracy spent huge sums of money trying to acquire spellstones, getting ripped off by Haruka-kun in the process. Haruka-kun defeated their elite force, captured the chief priest, and stole their special equipment. Despite the fortune they spent on spellstones, they didn't receive any in the operation, leading to a complete internal collapse. Without a monopoly on making magic tools, the Theocracy had little power remaining.

"We're totes safe with Nefertiri-san on our side, yeah?"

They had lost their ultimate weapon, Nefertiri-san. The Theocracy had nothing left besides money—no fighting force, and no political will.

"You'd think they'd have more left to throw at us, but it looks like we've left them powerless for the time being."

While our enemies had far from given up, they didn't have the ability to wage war. They were too bloodthirsty to agree to peaceful negotiations, but with their militaries and economies utterly destroyed, they didn't need to accept peace—they'd been essentially forced into it. Yup, that's why the war was over…I guess?

"Now let's go see the orphans!" everyone shouted.

They must've been waiting for us the whole time. We promised them we'd come back, but I was sure they were nervous. The older kids understood exactly the danger we were in. They had already lost their families—of course they would worry. We had to go back to them right away.

Haruka-kun had a glamorous send-off security squad of sexy elites: Angelica-san on his right, Nefertiri-san on his left, and Slimey on his head.

“Just Angelica-san on her own was more than enough, wouldn’t you say?”

“He’s not fully recovered yet, not physically,” explained Book Club President.

“He’s still horribly injured…”

“And yet he spent all night in a nonstop two-on-one wrestling match?!”

I had the sense that *was* the reason he hadn’t properly recovered yet. But Nefertiri-san meant business. She had crazy levels of determination. She went into that wrestling match determined to never leave Haruka-kun’s side. She fought against the forbidden maiden-toppling technique, the Texas Cloverleaf! Talk about crazy!

It was no wonder that Nefertiri-san was so happy this morning. She was happy and enjoying herself just being with *him.* That was why she was so, so happy, and bragging about her victory.

“Guess Haruka-kun’s got another lover?”

“He’s got *two* mistresses. Remind me why he could never get a girlfriend back in school?”

It had to do with what Angelica-san told us: the sadness and loneliness of life as a so-called monster. Eternal solitude, severed from all relationships. The terror and misery of not being human—and the hopelessness. Being alone forever with no one coming to save you. Things didn’t end up that way, however. Thank goodness.

Maybe he didn’t understand the difference between humans and monsters? I remembered him saying something to Stalker Girl about not being able to tell the difference between a duke and an orc. Haruka-kun didn’t care. He only divided things into whether he liked them or not. His own humanity was questionable in the first place!

“Angelica-san isn’t alone anymore.”

“Neither is Nefertiri-san. They have each other!”

Nefertiri-san must’ve been so scared. Because she was a monster! She wasn’t human, she had nowhere to go—all that uncertainty must’ve been terrifying. Nothing you could tell her would reassure her. Haruka-kun

didn't try. He didn't care about those anxieties—he wasn't even thinking about them. I doubted he even understood her worries. That was why she felt safe, and that was why she fought so hard for him. She found a place where she could rest, where she could smile. I understood why she was so happy by his side.

Now she had friends. Now she had a place.

In preparation for our reunion with the orphans, Haruka-kun had prepared *something*—a certain ridiculously decadent *objet d'art?* Didn't Lady Murimour's forces already go back to the frontier?

"Er, ya know these horse-drawn carriages I *acquired* from the Theocracy? Just did some minor remodeling for the orphans' romping-about pleasure, and to romp to their sides at high speed, coincidentally. You can see well out the windows, but if you go too fast you won't be able to register the scenery, so I don't recommend it. So long as you don't try to turn, you've got top-class destructive charging force! It's a guaranteed unbeatable vehicle, so I think the orphans are gonna dig it. I've rigged it so that just boarding it gives you an experience share, so it's prime for power-leveling and stuff."

"Just make a normal safe carriage, damn it! You don't need to teach the kids *this* level of speed!"

Before us stood an orphan-mindset-warping monstrosity of an over-the-top, luxuriant king's carriage. It was covered in vicious spikes. Any enemy spotting this carriage would instantly turn and run the other way. A classic Haruka-kun design. We just freed the capital from invaders, and now the second army division was going to be tricked into thinking another wave was incoming—this one more terrifying than the last!

"Guys, it's fast," Haruka-kun said. "I thought we wanted to go meet them quickly, so why are you criticizing my heavy-artillery bullet-train carriage design? Was the drill a bit too much? It's just for the aerodynamics, guys, c'mon! And the spikes are adorable!"

"A carriage that can generate so much aerodynamic force that it can literally get off the ground and *fly* is no longer a carriage!"

"Throwing fluid dynamics out the window is one thing, but how about starting with maintaining common sense?!"

“Yeah, because next thing you know, you’ll be setting fluid dynamics on fire and making them fly across the room!”

“The room, which you should’ve read better! Remember common sense! It deserves its time to shine too, you know!”

“I don’t think common sense has gotten a single chance to thrive the entire time we’ve been here!”

He powered up the horses with all sorts of fancy extras, too: Leg Speed-Up Plate, High-Speed Horse Armor, Speed-Up Helmet, Speed-Up Saddle, Speed-Up Bridle, Speed-Up Hooves, Speed-Up Ribbons. He tied the Speed-Up Ribbons on to the horses’ tails, completing the dreadful, spiny horse armor with adorable little ribbons? *I think we might need to place some additional orders for those!*

“Wow, the inside is so spacious and pretty!”

“And the outside is murderous and horrifying…”

“If we had this carriage, we could’ve eaten our beef on rice while sitting down!”

Uh, it’s not like it’s necessary to eat lunch while on the move? We took off in the carriage and…my lord, it was fast. So fast.

“How is this faster than High-Speed Movement?!”

“Did you teach Ground-Shrink to the horses, too?!”

“I guess this is what happens when you layer on speed-up equipment like that. But we definitely can’t turn, right?!”

“It’s not the horses’ fault they’ve gotten so aerodynamic!”

Sat aboard the *Ultra-Luxurious Sexy Female Knight Passion Greeter DX* model, we double-checked with Haruka-kun: there was, in fact, no known issue with the ultra-high-speed movement. But why did the name of the vehicle change every time? And why was it getting longer? The horse equipment was even more extravagant than the interior. Haruka-kun always went full-throttle on the wow factor. The only issue was that the sexy female knights the carriage was designed for…weren’t actually here?

At least he could take a rest now. After all the fighting, it was finally over. The enemy-crushing, happiness-preserving rip-off master could

finally rest.

"We really don't need to rush so much."

"But we don't want to keep the kids waiting."

"Yeah, Haruka-kun was so worried about making the kids worry that he went and built *this* thing."

We all looked at one another. "Do we *really* have to arrive in the capital in this terrifying contraption?"

Haruka-kun brought peace so we could go see the kids again, and so those same kids could grow up in happiness. He must've finally drifted off to sleep by now. I would've hoped so, after a nonstop night of two-on-one wrestling.

"We won't be able to go straight back to the frontier, right?"

"Yeah, Duke Omui and Princess Girl are coming to the capital too."

"Oh, by the way," said Vice Rep B, "Haruka-kun asked if we had dresses. I said, like, yes and stuff?"

"What!" everyone gasped. "We're gonna get summoned for another official dress sesh?!"

"Is he gonna put on a ball or something?!"

Vice Rep B wasn't wrong, technically. We all had dresses, but we couldn't show up to a public ball in them! They were all *way* too revealing!

"Kimono or something would work too, if it wasn't a ball."

"The kimonos Haruka-kun made had tons of resistances and Storage on them! They even change color! They're so useful."

Those were fine, but the dresses we had were *not*. I didn't know what kind of dress would be acceptable, much less what would *turn out* acceptable after Haruka-kun sat down to sew them. Even Princess Girl's dress was sexy. Hers was the sexiest of all, come to think of it! That wasn't meant for a ball. That was meant for a dungeon.

"The one he made me is crazy short!"

"Mine has a back slit down to the hip bone!"

"Yeah! The one he made me is open down to my ass!"

“Every single one of them is ridiculously sexy?!”

Ladies, what exactly did you order? Although…my dress *also* had slits that exposed my back and shoulders. Maybe since we needed full-body protective armor for everyday life here, everyone wanted more revealing clothes as an act of rebellion? Even our armor was starting to get sexy now—the vanguard in particular had some wild gear!

Those kinda clothes were too *avant garde* for this world, given how much you could, er, see…

Thankfully, they hadn’t gotten their time to shine yet. Those dresses… They weren’t for parties, no. We would come across as vendors for an especially suspicious brand of store dressed in those things. *And somehow, Haruka-kun would make a profit off of it!*

DAY 73

NOON

I think the winner of the best prisoner of all time deserves to get captured first, doesn't he?

THE ROAD

WE HEADED BACK to the capital in three carriages. Miss Armor Rep, Slimey, Dancer Girl, and myself went in the first carriage, the *Ultra-Luxurious Sexy Female Knight Passion Greeter DX*. The sexy female knights hadn't come back yet—where were been freshening up this whole time? I knew that girls took a while to get ready, but I was getting suspicious.

"So he stole his own prisoner escort, huh?"

"Well, I heard the original owners got so scared of their own horses that they couldn't approach them."

"Wow, he *really* deserves some sort of best prisoner of all time award!"

Meanwhile, baseless critiques piled on us from the passengers of the *Highway Orphan Liner*. I decided to let those rude comments go out of my boundless generosity. With *jiggly-jiggly* on my right, *wobble-wobble* on my left, and *boinko-boinko* on my head, it was a happy journey. *Thank god I loosened the suspension before we set out,* I thought. All of the beds on board shook gently along with the carriage, causing slippery slippage and juicy jiggling—a marvelous contraption! A wonderful trip! Since we'd be bringing the orphans back with us, the sexy stuff had to be limited to the one-way journey, so I had to get my fill now!

Nodding off gently and jiggling generously all the while, we advanced towards the capital. Even with these carriages, the journey took a full day. Much longer than flying. It was nice to have a relaxed journey, though. I was exhausted.

"Let's be friends," Dancer Girl said to Slimey.

Jiggle jiggle!

I also brought my demon scythes with me, so we had sound protection too. I took a peek at the dungeons where the Deluges occurred on the way, but they were really weak. All of them were about thirty-floor affairs; they didn't even have any hidden rooms. *C'mon, the kingdom should've easily been able to take care of these!* We stopped at a former dungeon to have lunch. It was a rare rainy day, for once.

"Urgh, I ate so much yesterday that one more set isn't enough!"

"But Nefertiri-san's *Dance Dance Revolution* sesh will totes be enough exercise!"

"I let my guard down. I never expected pasta carbonara to show up here!"

"Today was supposed to be a day off from big meals. *Supposed to!*"

The girls were in an uproar. "Carbonara! Has! Arrrrriiiived!!!"

"What are you guys doing, worshipping spaghetti?!"

After I gave it a try, making carbonara was actually pretty easy. It wasn't the real thing, but it tasted great. Still, just the flavor was more than enough to take us all back.

Everyone had lost too much, and that was a problem. It was going to be impossible to bring everything back. *I definitely can't make smartphones?* I never had one myself! I only had a flip phone, and one of those wasn't on the table either. I mean, there was no reception here! Forget it!

"Well, it's not so much carbonara as a carbonara-esque pasta-thing with pan-cooked pork and mushrooms and mystery-animal milk and unknown-bird-egg wheat noodles, all flavored generously with black-pepper-esque spice. Kinda."

"It's fine! It looks like carbonara to me!"

I still hadn't gotten any cheese or cream. I was able to confirm that they existed, however. When pizza arrived, the girls would probably get down on their knees! Soda was impossible, though. I'd glanced at the list of ingredients on a soda can before—how could I possibly remember all that?

“Bon appetit!” the girls shouted.

Wiggle wiggle!

They piled heaps of pasta onto giant plates, even though I had prepared twenty-two small plates and one bucket for them.

“S-sauce is flying everywhere! Don’t try to stretch the noodles! Why are you stealing enough pasta to wind it around your fork into a ball?!”

Pure chaos—we even had dual fork wielders in the arena. Servitude had reset Dancer Girl to her base level, but she was still powerful. She whirled the pasta around her fork like a twirling ballet dancer and danced away on her fleet feet! She was stealing and wheeling pasta all over the place! *Pasta enhances girl power to its deadliest extreme—carbonara, be afraid!* Well, she looked like she was having fun, so whatever.

“I might just need to get a mosaic done of these girls with white fluids dripping out of their mouths, dribbling off their tongues, and splashed around their lips.”

“So yummy, so *yummy*!”

“Tastes like home!”

There was lip-licking going on left and right! Both manners and diets were done for! Then, when we got back on the highway, the shaking continued. As in the simulated, stimulated shaking, as in well, basically—we shook the carriage, got it?

The *Highway Orphan Liner* horses were still full of energy, running so fast with all of their Speed-Up boosts that it was almost as if they had Ground Shrink skills of their own.

“This is why that carriage can’t turn! There’s no way those horses could turn at this speed.”

Jiggle jiggle.

Still, the carriages were faster than expected. I’d give the horses restoration mushrooms as a reward later. Meanwhile, a new question—as in challenge—as in dangerously criminal deed had emerged from the dangerous mouth of none other than Dancer Girl!

“Royal, study, mastered sex positions,” she said.

She was quite the technician. She had studied sex techniques under an ancient imperial princess. Positions that were even hard for Miss Armor Rep to pull off. My god!

"And that included the study of…the Frankensteiner?! What exactly *was* the culture of that empire?!"

I'd love to move there and find out, but it had been vanquished long ago. Now these dark secrets had been passed on to Miss Armor Rep as well, reviving a neo-classical era of ancient techniques!

"That sex mastery is almost too masterful. It's enough to master a masochist teenage boy, but I managed to overcome their might with a double knock-out of my own and force them into a little nap? Yup, hearts for eyes!"

Let's keep the contents of this carriage our little secret. The contested contest had been so contentious that Diamond Fist leveled up twice. Yeah, it was no joke messing around with two Dungeon Empress-level fighters! Stats alone decided the matches at this point! As I continued with my various side-jobs, the carriage wobbled. More orders, clobbered!

"Huh? An order for matching horse-tail ribbons? I suppose Class Rep used to tie her hair with a ribbon… What, she wants to match the horses?"

We weren't in a hurry. *I think we'll be plenty relaxed in the capital too,* I thought.

"Even if we get there quickly, we'll still have to wait for Princess Girl and Mr. Meridad? And that blood-headed baldie, the newly bald-headed chief priest. Class Rep really made a mess of him when she took him captive. She beat him so bald that he may as well be a goblin! Does that make the nobles kobolds?"

Wiggle wiggle.

Manju sure is terrifying! Fortunately, the local girls who worked at the souvenir shop for me on the frontier agreed to go work in the capital branch, even bringing their families with them.

As I did my side-jobs, I still had some spare time. I made some improvements to the capital road to speed up our return. Those

improvements only further showcased the power of the *Highway Orphan Liner*. The orphans would be thrilled, I was sure. It was comeback time.

"For leotards, that is! I've gotten a boatload of orders for the highly popular Dancer Girl aerobics class for alluring body-sexifying sessions… Hang on, why does Dancer Girl need a leotard too? Miss Armor Rep's got plenty, sure, but wearing one of those in front of other people? That can only be for a chosen few. I mean, Miss Armor Rep wore her black leotard and then her white leotard only to shift over to team blue, and then team gray, and all-in-all, it was an all-out alluring display, yep. She was very busy putting them on and taking them off!"

"All colors, please, with extras."

She also needed the extra leg-warmers, hairbands, and ballet shoes.

"By the way, there also seems to be a rush of belly dancing outfit orders from the girls. The Mean Girls and the arts club are both busy making their designs, but either is going to be worrying—er, wonderful to witness, ya know?"

Now that I had enslaved Dancer Girl, I had to make her clothes. After a furious extended battle, Mr. Magic Hands determined her shape and measurements, and Jupiter Eye seared them into my mind! Making them was difficult given her Gymnastics Girl-levels of pure flexibility, so we needed to do sixteen consecutive rounds of fitting sessions that involved much putting on and taking off. Taking them on two-on-one was unfair but twice as fun, even with double the ass and boobs and thighs entwining my teenage form. The moment any hole opened, it required some sort of invasion… Revival was already up to level 7 now.

An endless battle in the narrow carriage. A war of attrition. Adding in my side jobs, and it was a busy trip. I certainly couldn't show this side of myself to the orphans, so it was better to get it out of my system now! I hoped all this fun wouldn't kill me.

"I want to work on equipment, but I really should stay away from Dancer Girl's sealed item, right? 'Mythological Coffin: Weaponization. Perfect Invincibility. Auto Defense. Auto Repair. Total Strengthening. Magic Sword Flurry. ? ? ? +Attack +Defense' and all?"

No response. Yeah, there was a double-Xs-for-eyes situation over here. This equipment was on the level of Miss Armor Rep's Platinum Armor, so just putting it on would give Dancer Girl huge boosts.

"Can't beat the rush you get when you fuse good stuff with good stuff. An electrifying collab between her bangin' body and sexiness and allure—and wait, who was playing dead inside it the whole time? Of course I brought that item—it was on the ground, practically up for grabs!"

Even Dimension Blade couldn't cut through that coffin—anyone who hid inside was definitely safe in there. I didn't believe that chief priest old dude could hide equipment from Jupiter Eye, not with his measly Barrier Severing Staff. Which I stripped off of him, by the way.

"It wasn't that I couldn't find him—he just wasn't there? All I could see was that giant coffin. I couldn't detect anything inside, couldn't hear a sound! He only popped out after I lost my arm and my weapons so he could only break the seal on Dancer Girl *from the inside*… He's even more of a loner than I am! Give *him* my title!"

I was ticked. Still, now I got big boosts from "Severing Staff: Total 30% boost to all stats. Magic Skill Control. Severing. Seal. MP boost." Right now, my biggest problem was that I didn't have the Vitality to withstand the force of my abilities. Maybe this would further improve my Magic Entanglement—increased Magic Control and a higher Intelligence stat. Since I nearly ran out of MP during this last fight, I'd happily take the MP boost.

"Just looking at 'Severing' stops me in my tracks, so it's kind of a useless effect, isn't it? I can't trust an item that doesn't let me run away at a moment's notice! I don't think Seal is going to seal away the lectures I face!"

Jiggle jiggle?

Those lectures weren't ordinary skills, you know?

"I'll ask the nerds when they get back because they have Seal too. Oh, and then I'll use it to seal their Forcefield and burn their heads!"

Jiggle jiggle!

Now with Wisdom and the Severing Staff, I had improved my magic control a bit. I'd raised my level to boot, although the effects of that were unclear. My best option was to use my boosted Vitality to overcome my inability to control the skills…and just fake the rest. I leveled up twice this time, but my Vitality increased the least out of all my stats. I had to compensate with my Intelligence. I got a lot of other fancy equipment, but all of it was poison and psychological ailment-type stuff. Nothing of any real use. On the other hand, selling this stuff would be too dangerous.

"Above all else, the designs suck, so I know the girls will disapprove. Those girls have high standards! I guess I'll just break them apart for raw materials. Went to all that work picking them up, after all, so I don't wanna waste 'em."

After stripping them off all the old dudes, there was a mountain of stuff on the ground, so I picked it all up. All *mine*, geddit?

Now then! I just had to quickly finish things up in the capital, get the orphans, and go back to the frontier. I wanted to get back to raiding dungeons, since that was the most profitable. I had a lot to get done before we did that.

"Not having enough Vitality is just self-destructive, self-implosive suicide, I guess. I don't have enough HP, so I end up dying every time I can't finish up a battle right away. And it always hurts!"

Jiggle jiggle!

Something felt wrong about having to pick up my own dismembered arm and shove it back onto my shoulder. At least my status said I was still human!

"I think the only part of my status I can trust is my name and race. That's the one part I can't afford to doubt!"

Wiggle…

It was almost time for dinner. It was raining too, so I handed out some bamboo-shoot bento boxes to everyone. The girls were all pretty worn out, as in not wearing much…as in *where were their clothes?!*

"H-hang on!" I cried. "You told me to come in and all, so put on some clothes first!"

“But it’s dinnertime!” they shouted. “Bamboo-shoot bento!”

“More like tank-top shoots and tube-top shoots and miniskirts shooting up everywhere! All right, there you go! And no complaining about the price!”

They all had such a huge collection of clothes now, but the skin percentage in their room was seriously high! I ought to make them pajamas. They always seemed to need something new.

The first and second cars of the *Highway Orphan Liner* had ten people each, but each time I entered the room to give out the bento, I was struck by visions of bare legs and low-cut shirts on all sides. A lack of Defense that would make you think the girls traded their HP and Vitality for SHA—their *Shame* stat!

“Why don’t you wear the damn bras I nearly died making for you?!”

The leggings were even more dangerous than I could’ve imagined, especially for a Jupiter Eye-wielding teenage boy whose eyes had no place to rest! To make matters worse, Wisdom took a picture of each and every angle I encountered as I tried to find a place to aim my gaze!

But you know something? The girls deserved time to relax and be as casual as they wanted. That awful, stupid war was finally over. And without anyone dying too.

DAY 74

MORNING

If double or nothing yields next to nothing, maybe the double was nothing all along.

DIORELLE CAPITAL

THE CITY GATES OPENED, and the horse-drawn carriages proceeded into the capital. It had only been a few days, but the capital already felt so familiar. The capital didn't seem to feel the same way about us, though. They looked like they expected us to rob them, but they eventually let us pass. When we entered the slum quarters and arrived at the orphanage, the orphans all ran out of the souvenir shop to greet us.

"Yaaaaaaaay!!!"

They flew at us, hugging everyone and especially piling on to Haruka-kun, making a small mound of children on top of him. A human pyramid? Nefertiri-san nodded in approval. Did she agree with their technique or something?

"We're back!"

Haruka-kun escaped from the human pyramid and taunted them. "I never back down! And stuff," he said, only to get swarmed and buried in children anew. He was a popular orphan landing destination.

The elf girl Erailia-san also came to meet us. Her sickly body had regained its strength, and she looked beautiful now. You'd think that elves would be a bit more modest in the chest department but…damn. Vice Rep A and C were quaking with fear as they beheld her bosom. Even after getting push-up bras, they still lost to her. *I'll console them later.*

"Welcome back to Diorelle," she said. "Everything is going well at the orphanage and the shop. All of the people here treat us wonderfully."

The commander from the second army division also stuck with them and posted soldiers to patrol the slum quarter. They defended the orphanage and the slum quarter perfectly.

"Are you all okay?" the orphans asked us. "Are you hurt?"

"We're fine," I told them. "The bad guys were beaten by your even badder Big Bro."

"That's right," Vice Rep A said, agreeing. "The scary guys met an even more frightening foe, and the cruel men met the cruelest fate of all."

"When you think about it, cruel is putting it lightly!"

Peace. The people who tried to kill us had died, and the people trying to steal from us had lost everything. The enemies trying to bend the kingdom to their will were bent over themselves. The people we wanted to rescue had all been saved. Haruka-kun had violently forced violence into peace, cruelly eradicated cruelty, and obliterated evil with his evil methods.

In the end, he brought so much happiness to the children that their own overflowing happiness buried him in turn. The rip-off artist used force and violence and cruelty to bring pure peace to the world.

"I can't breathe! Get off me! Where are you all even coming from? What is this Patriot Missile barrage of orphans? I'm gonna need an Iron Dome for these, and where is my opening for a counter-strike? Oh, I was wondering why it was so heavy—it's you, Tanuki Girl! What is this, a mountain of orphans with a tanuki on top?"

"Who are you calling a *tanuki?!* That's worse than Tiny Animal! I hate both!"

The kids were overjoyed. I saw some tears too, but they were tears of relief.

They all loved Haruka-kun. He complained and acted like he hated it, but that didn't stop them. The kids could tell based on their instincts. They knew he was a…well, not a *good* person… Uh, not a *kind* person either… Er, he was certainly a lewd person. Leaving all that aside, they understood they owed their safety and happiness to him.

I bet Nefertiri-san felt the same way. Haruka-kun didn't feel *bad* for those poor, lonely orphans. He didn't pity them or look down on them. He

didn't sympathize or give them charity. He just did what he wanted and didn't ask for thanks. He didn't expect gratitude.

I mean, he wasn't even taking their feelings into consideration—he launched his merciless happiness attack and forced smiles on to every one of their faces. He did whatever he wanted, and that involved mercilessly massacring all traces of unhappiness.

Haruka-kun tried to walk, dragging along the orphans who were clinging on to him. He was like a small mountain of children, shuffling slowly forward. He was stuck playing nursery schoolteacher today, covered in kids. I had more than a few problems with his planned curriculum—his ideals of moral cultivation and language itself were twisted beyond belief—but I doubted I'd be able to get the kids off him.

"You didn't get injured?" they asked him.

"No, not injured, just a bunch of old dudes tearing each other's hair out. Truly a miserable sight, ya know?"

"Are we gonna move?"

"Move, flee the capital, blow it up—wait, we're gonna do that? Well, there is that pimpin' king…"

"We *already* saved the capital!" the girls chimed in angrily.

"Don't blow it up after all that work to save it!"

"Who blows something up after setting it free?!"

At times, taking care of kids fit Haruka-kun so well it seemed like a calling, but only as the most devilish teacher the world had ever seen. He made all the kids freak out and cry so he could escape their grasp!

The souvenir shop had just run out of its clothing for sale as well as manju, so sales were way down. Overall, the shop flourished, especially with all the housewives who came to visit the kids and check on the new clothing arrivals. There was also a fresh batch of "I ❤ FRONTIER" goods.

The city had erupted in a fresh round of theatrics in celebration of Duke Omui and the princess for defeating the dungeon Deluges. They also lavished attention on Lady Merielle, who was pretty popular herself. It was an impressive performance to pull off so quickly. But we black-haired maidens were shy, and…wait a second, no one fought in those crazy

revealing outfits? Why were we in bikini armor in the posters put up all over the city? We looked hot, but seriously?

Haruka-kun had finally made his masterpiece: bikini armor. Angelica-san told us about it, so it had to be true. She tried on everything he made. Obviously, after putting it on she immediately took it off, and then they had a battle of a different sort, but I digress… The bikini armor had incredible magic protection, stronger than any of the other equipment Haruka-kun had made so far, offering top-class defense in exchange for steep MP consumption. If you used the armor until it drained all of your MP…the stress would be too great and the bikini would crumble away. *New arrest warrant issued. Suspect: Haruka!*

"Yup, you're guilty!" everyone agreed.

"H-hang on," he protested. "Well, everything about this bikini rally is true! I mean not true, I mean—isn't it wise to get protection from your undergarments too? I made them out of an abundance of caution. If the material doesn't stick directly to your body, then it can't protect you for nearly as long. When I tried making an underwear armor model, I saw how strong the defenses were! So strong that they broke the underwear itself! That was just a calculated miscalculation of the teenage-boy variety, resulting in three large-scale teenage-boy battles. But it worked! I mean, it doesn't protect everything, I mean, not most things. In fact, it invites attacks of a different sort, but those are *good* attacks! Leaving the attacks aside, emergency defenses are a must! Emergency defenses under one's clothing are just so practical. They don't hide much, but there's a really bountiful upside there. A big, bountiful, bouncing upside, ya know? So I didn't do anything wrong!"

"It might protect your life, but not your maidenhood!"

"At *best* it's a bikini, and in the worst-case scenario you're left butt naked—how could armor be so dangerous to a maiden?!"

Since thinning out the material made it too hard to move, he had only managed to make a bikini design so far. I'm sure he planned to improve it further…almost definitely in a shady way, but I couldn't fault his logic. *Oh god, what if he gives them to all of us?*

In exchange for their work at the souvenir shop, Haruka-kun gave the kids lunch, and we all chatted and relaxed. Then a messenger rushed in

announcing that the second army division commander, Terisel, was on his way. She was a messenger that Haruka-kun called Herald Girl. He really had no plans to remember *anyone's* name.

When I went to call on the one-man manufacturing machine in his workshop studio and mass-production factory…things were just absurd. I was over level 100 with True Sight, and even I couldn't figure out what was going on back there! He was working on several types of clothes and daily necessities while simultaneously making manju across the room! This wasn't manufacturing—this was magic. A huge volume of products appeared in piles. I couldn't see what process was creating them, so it looked like they were literally appearing out of thin air. Even more incredible was how the quality of the clothes seemed to be getting even better…and the manju even tastier!

I nearly flew straight for the manju production line, but then I remembered why I came to get him.

"Haruka-kun, do you have a minute? Lord Terisel—the second army division commander—he's here. He says he wants to talk to you if you can take your hands off of all of this for a second."

"Oh, my hands are totally free, Magic Hands are taking care of everything. I certainly won't be putting my hands on that second division commander dude, or talking to his hands for that matter. How does my hands' current activity impact my ability to have a chat with that commander dude? If he's going to talk to me in sign language, I think I'll need to politely decline? Sign language with an old dude is no fun. If it's a sexy girl planning to run a sign language class, sign me up ASAP, I'd be more than happy to learn to talk with my hands in *that* sorta situation! I'd rather chop an old dude's hand off and offer my own hand and arm and leg and mouth and, ya know, *body* to engage in a fully gestured conversation with a lovely lady!"

I'd rather stick my hand over his mouth to shut him up. *Doesn't he understand idioms?* He mentioned he finally figured out the true meaning of the mysterious Consulting ability, but every time there was actually a consulting opportunity on the horizon, it seemed to conveniently vanish. *Don't leave him now, Consulting!*

My guess was that Haruka-kun wouldn't understand a single thing of what Lord Terisel had to say; he likely hadn't listened to my invitation to begin with. It'd be nice if that ability was programmed to self-destruct whenever he gave bad advice in a consulting session… Consulting was an amazing skill, so long as Haruka-kun didn't use it.

"I said take your hands *off* your work, not talk *with* your hands!" I hissed. "Why are you talking in circles like this? What exactly is inside that head of yours?"

I had made the crucial mistake of trying to have a normal conversation with Haruka-kun. Long monologues were a problem for Haruka-kun—if he couldn't get his point across, he just talked around himself and in circles until the conversation completely collapsed.

"Customer, here. And manju!"

Nefertiri-san has the right approach!

"Dancer Girl! Where did you come from?!"

He seemed to understand her. I guess talking to him in as few words as possible was the most effective?

"Manju!" she said. "More manju!"

"That's just a demand for manju!" Haruka-kun exclaimed. "And you didn't even mention the part about the second-division commander dude the second time! This girl is terrifying, Class Rep!"

Listen, once that hot, freshly steamed manju gets stuck in your brain… Slimey continued to gobble up snacks in the background.

I gave up. "Manju! Give us manju! Only manju! Got it?" *Give me manju!*

DAY 74

NOON

The official request from the teenage-boy manager is to not invite goblins and kobolds to the lace sesh.

SOUVENIR SHOP

ORPHANAGE BRANCH

IT WAS MY FIRST TIME seeing the second-division commander dude in a while—that guy guarding the capital. The commander dude had brought me a message from the pimpin' king.

"Wow, a pimp making a big-shot commander deliver a message. Classic pimp behavior. Was he all like 'Hit me uuuuppp!' and stuff?"

I shouldn't have cured a womanizing pimp with five wives like that. Maybe I should use my newly acquired Seal to seal away the pimpin' king's pimpin' abilities… But then all that would be left was an old dude. May as well just bury him, right?

"So basically, to put it simply and directly, to get straight to the point, to basically Ground-Shrink and gravitate the point directly to *our* point, the royals were like, 'dance, dance you high schoolers! Show me hell itself!' and forbid discriminating between the pimpin' and the simpin', so I should just get down to business and bonk 'em!"

"How did we just get from 'ground-shrunk' to a long dialogue on a dance party?!"

"What is *with* your grudge against the king for having five wives!"

Going to the balcony and announcing, "Ladies and gentlemen, I like sex," would've been briefer than this interrogation!

"In a few days the princess and Duke Omui will arrive in the city," said the commander. "When they do, we would like to greet them with the utmost gratitude possible, and in keeping with the royals' schedules. The king would have liked to travel incognito to thank you in person himself,

but Lord Vizmuregzero captured him on his attempt. I will have to extend his gracious thanks to you in his stead."

That king sure is as wild as a pimp!

"Oh, so there's a workout craze breaking out all over the kingdom. We'd better have Miss Armor Rep set up a boot-camp city and flood the market with leotards. It's time to open our seventh senses, comprehend the profound mystery of the universe and all that jazz. Ya feel?"

"He wants to hold a ball!" the girls shouted. "How did that turn into a workout sesh?"

"Well, it just seems necessary, right? I mean, the fresh order of manju that I made are already almost all gone, so with all those calories, we gotta talk boot camp, right?"

Huh? Why were all of the girls looking away from me now? Class Rep even used Ground-Shrink and Super-Speed to avoid eye contact!

"I'm pretty sure our Hijacker is gonna hijack the rest of the manju at this rate! That skill makes you super round, so how about one more set?"

"I'm not getting round!"

Jiggle jiggle?

Anyways, the girls needed dresses now. Did I need a tuxedo? I put up a giant "Nerd gang, get back to the capital? Idiocy has arrived? Ya vibe?" sign in the port, so hopefully they'd be back soon. Maybe I'd make the meatheads…tracksuit tuxedos?

"I suppose the girls can wear whatever besides dresses. Don't you all already have dresses? Why order more?"

"Haruka-kun in a tuxedo?"

"I want a white one! I wanna be a shining mermaid!"

"Hey, that's what I wanted!"

"I'll be a shining princess then!"

"How about a long-sleeve kimono? A white one!"

"Make my skirt long and floaty!"

"Hat," said Angelica-san. "I want hat."

“Matching, dress,” said Dancer Girl.

Boink boink!

Slimey was gonna wear a dress too? And why did everyone want white? I always made color-changing stuff with defensive effects and ailment-resistances.

“Okay, let’s say I make some dresses. Do you all really need the accessory support? The dresses and the shoes will only get you to the mid-floors of a frontier dungeon. What if I add some metal plates? Or coil on some chains? Oh, and because the skirts will be long, I could also throw in Storage in there. I mean, surely you want to add some accessories and small pieces?”

“A veil and gloves!” all the girls shouted.

“Forget the metal and the chains, but don’t forget corsages!”

“We’re going to the royal palace, not the king’s dungeon! We’re not going to a ball in full armor!”

“He probably doesn’t know the difference between a ball and a battle, or the difference between a castle and a dungeon.”

“Ohhhh, he probably wants to turn the ball into a battle and take out the king out of jealousy?”

They were so riled up! But damn, two outfits for each…and so many accessories! *What is a Core Sage, anyhow?*

“Got it,” I said, “I’ll graft status ailment resistance to the bouquets, Illusion on to the veils, Defense and Attack boosts to the gloves, and Evasion and Speed-Up on the shoes…but that leaves you guys a bit weak in the magic department, so how about some necklaces? Oh, and rings… although you’ve already got a bunch of those, so just bring your own?”

“Ooh, rings! Brilliant cut, please!”

Spellstones cut like diamonds—now *that* was an idea. *But please, give me some space ladies, my eyes are gonna bleed!* And don’t glare at me either, ’cause that’s scary. *I’m scared!*

And now I’ve been thrown back into my workshop!

“Didn’t the second-commander dude just say that there was no rush? That we could do it at any time?”

Well, the girls sure seemed like they weren’t going to let me out of here anytime soon. This was forced teenage-boy labor over here! For unimportant things at that! They all wanted lace dresses, so I had to sew them myself. I’d have to take the thread and use Alchemy on it to start the process. Once I adjusted the threads with the spellstone-powder coating, I further powered it up with Alchemy as I got to work. The thread now shone with a brilliant luster. Yeah, I wove in some iron threads too.

“Now you get a defense boost *and* some physical resistance! Something to defend from the Core Sages, right?”

I wove the lace into fabric…and if I didn’t let the girls choose their fabrics, a new maiden battle would break out, so I had to do each dress completely customized to their specifications. Fortunately, the weave made it easy to imbue magic into the fabrics, resulting in physical resistance buffs—the crafting advice from *Let’s Go Magic Items!* came in handy there. Up until now, weaving fabrics myself took an incredible amount of time, so it was a pain to do. Now I could produce fabrics instantaneously, mostly via controlling Magic Hands with Wisdom to set a recursive pattern. *Heck, may as well turn some spellstones into art-deco rhinestone MP-battery necklaces while I’m at it.*

“Wow, I kinda accidentally made these better than their regular equipment. Power this up with mithril and you could tackle dungeons in them, no problem!”

I wove defensive boosts and resistances into the fabric lining for good measure. Previously, doing that was too complicated for mass production, but now my Magic Hands could work many times more precisely than before and tens of times faster. The technological revolution of Wisdom was astounding! *I’ll definitely be able to make the best equipment yet now!*

“To put it simply, it’s time for me to make all-new outfits and equipment as part of my side job, and after that it’s inevitably underwear’s turn. How many side jobs does one dude need?!”

Still, it was necessary. Things got dangerous when they weren’t wearing equipment. Other people were the real danger. Monsters couldn’t

lie or deceive. But the church had equipment perfect for deception, super-sneaky weapons with poison and nullifiers and the rest of the works. Reworking our equipment for facing this different kind of danger had to be a top priority. *Of course, that's all part of our class's path to becoming a sexy sorority?*

"Yeaaah, this is gonna be nuts. Even better defenses than the vanguard's armor."

I powered up the iron thread that I stitched into the fabrics with mithril, which caused all of the attributes to shoot up. With so much fabric surface area crowded with additions, I was on my way to all-powerful dresses overflowing with defensive attributes and endowed effects. But it also meant working overtime!

This is impressive. I decided to expand my varieties of fabrics after that. Adding all those frills provided a ton of surface area to power-up. These dresses had gone nuclear.

"They can't be used in ordinary life or for raiding dungeons, but they're stretchy and easy to move in, so they should be perfectly suited for person-to-person combat. The problem is that you'll get attacked just for wearing them…and the monsters will be pretty surprised? 'Cause they didn't get a party invite?"

I'd just wing it with the tuxedos for me and the nerdbrains. Screw appearances—I'd rig 'em with iron. I mean, my house was a literal cave, and all I had around me for neighbors were goblins and kobolds. It wasn't like I'd ever wear my tuxedo. *I'm pretty sure goblins and kobolds don't party, so they wouldn't show up to one even if they're invited, yeah? Not that I'm inviting them. I'm a loner!*

DAY 74

EVENING

Being a beautiful princess is fraudulent, you're just a hamburger salesperson?

SOUVENIR SHOP

ORPHANAGE BRANCH

IN THE SOFT LIGHT of the bedroom, white limbs—shivering and intertwined—heaved backward and tumbled. *Uh, this is pretty tough without the eye contact? Weenie meanie whirly girlies?*

"Look, losing control like that just costs more time and magic power. When you move like that the tentacles just end up crawling all over you, ya know?"

"*Uuurgh…* Eeeeeek!"

"Wah! Agh! Ack! Ahhhhhh!"

"Wha, wha—no, not there!"

"St-staawwwwwp!"

"Uh, you guys are getting the character totally wrong? Not sure what kind of accent you're going for with 'stawwwwp' but it's just kinda cringe. And anyways, no local accents involve biting?"

"We're not biting, we're just—*ahng, ahhh!*"

The Mean Girls finally came out of the girls' meeting with their dress designs, so I went ahead and sewed them according to those patterns. Wisdom handled Magic Hands for a custom intensive measurement. Skin-tight precision via means of heavy petting! It was making the Mean Girls totally break out of character!

"Ack, eep, ugh, what is this…? It's even more intense than… before… This is insane!"

“Yeah, see, I’ve got five times the amount of Magic Hands as before, and they’re slimmer and more meticulous. They can move more deliberately, and each of their tentacles has gotten more precise and fastidious too, resulting in rave reviews.”

“This is not normal…”

“No! This is *so much* worse!”

When I started to release magic power, it chained together and expanded, causing waves of increasingly effective power-ups to manifest.

“Heeeeey, Haruka-kun?” called Vice Rep B. “It’s night now, and the kids are still up, so you can’t do naughty things to Shimazaki-san and her friends, ’kay? If they lose their virginity, it’s *your* responsibility, got it?”

“Uh, I’m only responsible for my slaves?”

“Just be…quieter? Have a baaaall!!!”

This was standard dress fitting, nothing more. When the Mean Girls turned into Steam Girls with their sexual moans, how was it my fault? *I’m only making dresses over here, seriously! Don’t make things unnecessarily steamy!*

“Vice Rep B, who went with your design? Bring it over here now, ’cause I can probably make about ten at once. Well, I could do twenty, but the room’s too small for that!”

The fabric stockpile dropped drastically as I stitched the test products together. Pannier skirts required a lot more fabric than I expected.

“Hey ladies, the Mean Girls will bite you if you cut in front of them, so just wait patiently, ’kay? As in, I’m not even opening my eyes and I can tell that my so-called blindfold is opening her hands wide open. It’s pretty suspicious from a teenage boy’s perspective that despite clearly being in violation of your job description, you haven’t been dismissed yet. Can you please let up on the eye pressure? You’re gonna gouge my eyes out!”

That was a rough false accusation from Vice Rep B, who was cuddling Slimey. And now three round objects were jiggling around here. *What is with this chorus of jiggling?!*

Jiggle jiggle!

“Wha—ugh—agh—who are you calling Steam Girls!”

“This isn’t our f-fault! These t-t-t-tentacleees!”

“And we’re not Mean Girls in the fiiiiiiirst plaaaaace!”

I didn’t need to rush these dresses, but the frills were a real pain. The Steam Girls had ordered some hot and steamy white frilly garter belts, which meant a lot of dangerous touching in dangerous places and dangerous deeds for which I was *definitely* not responsible. I had already declared myself innocent over ten thousand times in this capital, so why did no one seem to understand? There’s that story about the cat with ten thousand lives, so how about the boy with ten million lectures, all of which derived from false accusations and *none* of which could be resolved without sweets. Now we’re on round ten million and eight over here? *I’ve got so many troubles, ya know?*

“They’ve requested cathedral trains and tiered skirts and gathered skirts and balloon skirts and draped skirts. The works! They want to do bustle lines, and a straight-up wedding dress style?! A sheer dress? A dress with a giant bow? What are they gonna want next, a ballista? Bow and arrow on a dress—what is this, a siege?!”

For girls who claimed they didn’t want sexy dresses, they ordered a lot of sheer, see-through fabric with low-cut sweetheart necklines, bared shoulders, and tube-top cuts. Were those designs trendy in fantasy worlds nowadays?

With this and that, I was almost done with the extensive measurements and adjustments, and already sewing the Mean Girls’ designs. I was making improvements, additions, and adjustments to the deficiencies while fixing the balance… The Mean Girls had all calmed down at last, or rather, they were silently quivering. So long as they didn’t complain, that was fine with me? *Twitch-twitch*.

When I finally finished, their bodies toppled over one after another, and then continued to twitch in silence on the floor. *I did a great job with these*. My precision and calculating abilities had definitely improved. The jobs had gotten crazier, for sure… Why was I mastering the art of the side job in a freakin’ fantasy world?

“I don’t think I came here for the purpose of making bras and garter belts, but that’s what’s ended up happening.”

“OH MY GOSH!!! They’re so beautiful!”

After the Mean Girls finally woke up and showed off their dresses, they received a chorus of praise from the rest of the girls, who were still fretting over their designs. They struck poses, all calm and composed now, but I hoped everyone realized they were twitching unconscious with their legs spread wide open just a few minutes ago. *They’re playing the ever-mature models now, but don’t be fooled!*

“Ugh, I guess I’ve gotta get some frills for myself.”

“I thought the princess line style would be too basic, but it’s so beautiful when you see it for yourself!”

“The lace shoulder straps are sooo gorgeous, and the ribbon in the back is adorable!”

“You’re so beautiful!” the orphans piped in. “You’re like princesses!”

The Mean Girls blushed, and rightfully so. *They’re Mean Girls, not princesses?* They’ll bite you? Besides, they just finished selling hamburgers all day. Since when have you heard of princess burger saleswomen? Wait… what?

I prepared dinner and the bath next. This was a nonstop day of work if there ever was one! Meanwhile, the girls were holding their designs and their heads. I sighed at the sight of this gaggle of ten-designs-per-girl hopefuls in sheer hope that they stopped appearing.

“You only get two. Even one is more than enough!”

“But we can’t decide!” the girls protested.

“We want to wear all of them!”

They kept waffling between their designs and the all-lace dress I had mass-produced. No one seemed to care about all of the defensive potential and endowed effects I put into it! I worked so hard! (Weeps.)

At this rate, they wouldn’t be deciding today anyhow. The Mean Girls were having a hard time deciding on their second dresses, and they

looked ready to start biting at any moment. Don't tell me they'd bite the dresses too?

"Let's have dinner. If this goes on for much longer the seasons are gonna change."

Jiggle jiggle!

On the orphans' requests, I set up a buffet with rice balls, karaage, hamburg steak, omelets, and stew instead of unlimited soup. Yup, it was a buffet with the emphasis on *buff*. You'd have to be a meaty maniac to muscle in on these dishes! I dressed up the orphans in horned helmets and animal-skin vests so they'd be prepared to pillage all the plates they pleased.

"Let's dig in!"

"Rice balls!"

"Rice is so yummy."

"Big Bro, make me a garter belt too!"

"This pumpkin pie is the best!"

"I want air in my chest like Big Sis has!"

"More stew, please!"

"Big Bro, where are the chestnut manju?"

"I gotta get more karaage!"

It was a lovely scene of lively orphans. Grow up strong, kiddos. They massacred meal after meal, down to the last manju, and some of the girls peppered in requests for underwear too. *Uh, you might be growing up too, but that's not my problem?* It sounded like some of them were going to join the dance bootcamp that was starting today—it'd be beneficial for the girls' bodies for multiple reasons.

"I made a killing off the leotards, although with how much y'all ate, I think you might need to do some additional belly dancing too—nope, done talking! Eat as much as you want? There are plenty of seconds, but no chestnut manju yet 'cause I haven't found chestnuts yet! Don't threaten me with your fork, please? Oh god, that one is for battle, not eating! What is this, trick or trident?!"

If I didn't make the girls eat enough, how would they have the energy to tease me? Besides, a triangle attack from three girls would be even more dangerous than a trident for a teenage boy. That trident made its debut in the Great Carbonara Clash, but it was *way* too big for tonight's buffet! *It'll damage the plates! I better power those up with mithril!*

"Yum!"

"It's all so good!"

"Mmmph-hmmph!"

The girls were all collapsed outside of the bath after their one-more-set-sesh, so I supposed I would take my turn in the beatdown known as a training sesh. I'd have to take my turns with both Dancer Girl and Slimey. I sent magic flowing into the Universe Staff, activated Magic Entanglement from head to toe, and injected all of my magic power and skills throughout my body. My foes looked more than ready to do some entangling of their own.

Just breathing made my body creak. Air flowed into my body and settled, making me feel dense and heavy. That was an illusion—I wasn't actually slower or heavier. My distorted sense of time simply made it feel that way.

Up until now, it had felt like being in slow motion. When I activated the skills this time, I felt time physically pass me by like slow, heavy ticks on a clock. Wisdom slowed time down even further for me. Then the armored dancer started to move, unleashing a refined, gentle, super-speed Flash Attack.

"Here I come."

A purposeful, instantaneous strike, like Life or Death. God-Speed felt so painfully slow precisely *because* it was so fast. It came from fundamental skills, not some special power or erudite secret. She had simply mastered every last one of the fundamentals. I had finally caught up to her time scale, at least a little bit, so now I understood just how terrifying she was. And in the end…she beat the crap out of me?

"Urgh…"

A storm of skills and a mangled mess of me. I left it to my subconscious to use Random Fire; if I tried to use it on purpose, then I'd be punching at thin air. Controlling Random Fire, in theory, should be connected with mastering Life or Death. Random Fire had appeared out of an irregular strike I happened to land. That meant I wasn't getting all my attacks to line up properly yet. As a result, I couldn't even lay a finger on Dancer Girl.

"Not that I wouldn't have minded laying a finger on you, especially if that finger happened to slip—grrrraaagh!!! N-no, this is sword training, put that morning star away! That was another Flash Attack, wasn't it?! You've already mastered that thing!"

She had a second morning star now. Dual morning stars?! She'd be starting up a terrifying new martial arts school at this rate. *That's unbroken ground!*

"Don't shake your heads like that, Dancer Girl and Slimey, I didn't do anything! Why don't you try to help me? Huh? *Shake shake* and *jiggle jiggle*?"

They weren't going to save me today. (A beating ensues.)

Whack whack!

Jiggle!

I managed to block some of her attacks while hemorrhaging HP. I had achieved unbelievable power, but my opponent happened to have even more unbelievable power, so I was overpowered. Hard to believe as it was, the stronger I got, the worse she beat me. It was also hard to believe how full of fun and pleasure my nights were, but a gentleman never mentions those parts.

"Good work," Class Rep said. "After another round, it's DDR time, so get ready."

With that, the girls went off to their own beating. Wait, I was doing DDR as well! I mean, it sounded pretty ho—ehhm, no, nothing, I wasn't saying anything?

Twenty girls with morning stars, sure—but why did Miss Armor Rep have to join in? Hang on, who gave Dancer Girl a morning star?! *I'm sorry,*

have mercy… Sheesh, those girls were something!

DAY 74

NIGHT

I love looking at leotards, but not so much wearing them and dancing myself.

SOUVENIR SHOP

ORPHANAGE BRANCH

B*ATH TIME, BATH TIME!* I skipped out on DDR. I didn't own a leotard, for starters.

"Well, I technically do have one in my inventory, but that's for Miss Armor Rep, so it's not mine. *I'm* definitely not wearing one."

It felt a bit painful to miss out on twenty girls in leotards, but far too shameful to wear one myself and too awkward by far to loiter around watching. *I gracefully submit my full support from the sidelines!*

"This bath is the best!"

Jiggle jiggle!

"Slimey, where'd you come from? Hey, I don't mind if you jiggle, but make sure to actually wash yourself—you can massage me *after* you get clean, got it? Feels good, though!"

Jiggle jiggle!

There were so many calories to be burned that the conflagration could consume the entire universe. I saw Dancer Girl do DDR once, and she had it *down*—including hip-hop moves. She even completed Challenge mode!

Dancer Girl was just toying with the rest of them though. She didn't even attack—she just warmed them up with aerobic exercises, brought them to their limits, and then knocked them out with some finishing anaerobic exercises. I could sense them flopping over unconscious from all the way back here in the bath.

“They gotta remember their defensive movements even if they can’t follow the dance moves…”

Jiggle jiggle.

She easily bested twenty level-100 warriors by dancing alone and was poised to unleash even more. Even Miss Armor Rep participated.

“Look, I’m not *not* interested, but if DDR wasn’t enough, how the hell am I supposed to join the belly dancing? Especially in terms of clothing?”

While Miss Armor Rep still beat the living crap out of me, I had made some progress. Before, I got beaten up without having a clue what was going on. Now I got beaten up while having a tiny inkling what was going on. *Progress! Even if it hurts!*

“She did beat me up, but my High-Speed Thinking was keeping up with her.”

I had also managed to use Jupiter Eye to sense where she would strike before she did (ouch), and which direction I had to flee before I could (ouch), so it was a highly comprehensible beating. Why did I get the sense that a comprehensible beating hurt even more than an incomprehensible one, though?

Wisdom handled information processing with its Parallel and High-Speed Thinking abilities, so my thought processes and analytical prowess had improved by leaps and bounds. Then, I had the effects of my items too. My newly composite and leveled up “Severing Staff: All stats+ 30%. Magic Skill Control. Severing. Seal. MP boost” and “Wisdom” worked well together. There was also Magic Entanglement, which I had gotten a better handle on…somewhat. I still couldn’t control it, but I had started to anticipate what it might do. That introduced the possibility of being able to control Random Fire, which opened the path to mastering Life or Death.

“And when I tried to walk down that path, I got the crap beaten out of me by an iron ball until I literally couldn’t walk anymore…”

Jiggle jiggle.

I needed to be careful when using the Severing Staff. *Who knows what direction a morning star might swing in from!*

It seemed like the Magic Control skills that I had were different from the Magic Skill Control that was a function of the Severing Staff. I guessed the basic skill dealt with using Magic Entanglement to help master magic spells like Teleport, Gravity, and Demolish. Even with Wisdom handling information processing, I couldn't keep up with using Magic Control to handle Magic Entanglement combined with Holding magic.

Because of how incomprehensible it all was, I finally saw the path before me. I could advance. No matter how much my own skills swindled and deceived me, I had to fight. Before, I figured once the girls mastered their cheat skills, they'd be safe and I'd retire. That was naive. Class Rep and the rest were too adamant about living in this world.

Jigglejigglejigglejigglejigglejigglejiggle…wiggle!

Slimey jiggled six hundred times before coming to a rest. The bath wasn't even hot anymore. I got out of the water and plenty of side jobs requiring my self-control awaited me. *Yes, these adjustments will awaken my true power!* This was a different kind of war, but one where I had the divine wind behind my back!

"It isn't about the numbers you have in a fight—it's about the number of fights!"

Looked like the girls' meeting had already let out. Immediately, two flanks surrounded me before I could put my cloak on. From the right, a tanned hand gripped my wrist tightly; on the left, a pale hand folded into mine. As they seized me, I unleashed my tentacles to encircle their vulnerable legs. *Magic Hands don't have many tricks up their sleeves, but they do have plenty of tentacles!*

They thought they had defeated me because I wasn't wearing my cloak, and true, I didn't have *unlimited* tentacles without it. Thanks to Wisdom, though, even if I couldn't control Magic Hands, I could completely control my tentacles. Even with my arms and legs pinned, they could move freely. The power of countless tentacles with Vibration magic set to ON meant *plenty* of moaning and groaning!

"Eeep! Ahhhhhn!"

In order to increase the power with Magic Entanglement, Wisdom processed and calculated countless stages of recognition and control. It

instantly examined all the information captured by Jupiter Eye, turning resources into sweet, juicy knowledge. All of the fine details and weaknesses of Miss Armor Rep and Dancer Girl were revealed to me… from neck to back to stomach… *From the inguinal ligament to the anterior superior iliac crest. Now those are some crazy weak points! Time to nibble on them?*

Nibble nibble!

"Ahhh!" *Quake!*

Ah, Wisdom, you're so right!

Lick lick!

"Mm, ahhh…" *Twitch!*

I stole an advantage despite being outnumbered. The battle became a massacre, and with both girls on their backs quivering, I went to town. I battled them one at a time after one woke up, and then moved to the next once she was knocked back out, shifting from target to target in a constantly reviving, never-ceasing feast of toppling. I'd achieved the teenage-boy power to overcome two Dungeon Emperor-class women! Only at night, sure, but I *had* obtained it! *'Cause they beat the crap out of me during the day.*

That power: Sex God. It was the promoted combo of the max-levelled skills Super Horny and Alpha Male. The two skills merged and promoted into Lascivious level 1, granting me the skill Sex God level 1.

Now that both girls were knocked out, it was time to do some work. I still had to make a lot of outfits for Dancer Girl. She must've felt so lonely—she was finally free, but she was in a world where she didn't know a single soul. She had made friends with the other girls now, but there was no way she didn't still feel anxious. That was why she was so attached to me. She'd be back for another round soon enough… *She really doesn't have any interest in conversation, huh?*

I made lots of clothes and let her try them on, I made her plenty of delicious food—whatever it took to take the edge off her loneliness. I knew I couldn't erase all of her sadness and isolation. There was no getting back what she had lost. Even if all of my gifts were knock-offs compared to that,

at least they did something to fill the gaps in her heart. I never wanted her to feel that kind of loss again.

"And for *that* reason, I'll make a…miniskirt for her maid outfit! Oh boy, I can't wait!"

I whipped up some outfits for Dancer Girl, then went to work mass-producing clothing and underwear. As you well know, after countless hours measuring…and measuring…and *measuring* every inch, and then groping, slithering, and calculating… I couldn't go wrong with sizes. What happened to making equipment? Don't worry about that. For now, clothes were my top priority. After that, hairbrushes and toothbrushes and nail clippers. Daily necessities were essential. My body soap was a bestseller with rave reviews, especially from me. The way the former-mummy's skin glistened, gleamed, and jiggled with moisture—now *that* was a treat for the senses. *Thank you very much, soap!*

DDR was a big hit with the other girls, so they'd all become friends with Dancer Girl very quickly.

"If she stops clinging to me, that might create some gaps in my own heart. But I gotta prioritize Dancer Girl's happiness, 'cause even if she takes a little distance, well, that just opens up some new avenues for play. Teenage boys like to do it that way too, ya know?"

Since I brought her back, I wanted her to be happy. I mean, with a body like that, of course I was happy she was clinging to *me*, but it was more important for her to get along with Miss Armor Rep and everyone else. Friends can always make you feel a little less lonely. Speaking of which, something to make me feel less lonely was stirring under the curtains.

Once my clinging and pushing-over sesh with Miss Armor Rep was over, more side jobs awaited me. Then came some twisting and submission with Dancer Girl, more side jobs, then a furious battle with a revived Miss Armor Rep, more side jobs, then a clash between a newly awake Dancer Girl and an overwhelmed teenage boy. Then more side jobs. I mean, four long legs sticking out of the covers was just too much temptation! I was staring at them the whole time. Like, the *whole* time.

"Okay, now she has about as many clothes as Miss Armor Rep," I said. "She doesn't need as many hats, but I can ask her what she likes and

make more later?”

Yup, I had done an excellent job at preparing her a wardrobe of my favorite outfits! This white cheongsam would match her tanned legs perfectly! And of course it was mini! *Do you even know me?*

I could whip up some accessories for her once I knew her preferences. I tried making a load of Egyptian-style accessories—if she didn’t want all of them, I could sell them to the other girls to wear with their belly dancing outfits. Problem was, the girls hadn’t been raiding dungeons lately, so they were all poor. The Deluges all came from low-grade dungeons, so they hadn’t made much cash from those. I’d sucked up most of the economy anyhow, so I’d sell them for cheap. *Prepare for a maidenly bargain war, ladies!*

Then, in a dramatic uprising, Miss Armor Rep and Dancer Girl revived simultaneously to pin me down to the bed from both sides—and I couldn’t use my tentacles anymore! Was I about to lose the endurance match?! I sensed that revenge—terrible, titsy revenge!—was on its way.

“Please go easy on me?” I whimpered.

Shake shake.

Oh god…

(The battle begins.)

DAY 75

MORNING

Capture of the one who sighted a suspicious person prevented disaster prevention.

SOUVENIR SHOP

ORPHANAGE BRANCH

THE NEXT MORNING started off with an incident. A suspicious person was sighted. Persons, rather. Nine of them.

"Whooaaa! Little girls!"

"Totes adorbs!"

"Suspicious person, sighted!"

"Capture them!!!"

The suspicious individuals were caught and isolated while the orphans fled the scene. *I have some burning to do.*

The meatheads were going crazy. The orphans were facing stranger danger—those meatheads were masters of mischief!

"How's it goin'? Why don't y'all just keep being brigands, or pirates, or barbarians, and just stay doing that and don't come back. I mean—whoa, you're back! What a surprise! Can't I let Class Rep train you? Or put you in your cages? Please?"

I thought they'd come back rich, but they were flat broke. *There isn't a single benefit to those idiots coming back, then!* They probably came back because they remembered I fed them. Just a buncha stray meatheads.

"Uh, Haruka-kun?" the nerds called. "Why did you take us captive the second we got back?!"

"Well, it was a suspicious person sighting, ya know? The best disaster prevention strategy is to burn down strangers before they bother the children. Ya know?"

“No, don’t burn us!”

The criminals seemed to have complaints, but I couldn’t let them run loose in an orphanage.

“Suspicious? We’re your classmates!”

“We were doing a favor for *you* and came back on *your* request!”

“You take us captive before you even say, ‘welcome back,’ huh?”

“I was just surprised by the kids, that’s all!”

So went the testimony from the suspicious nerds, but I knew they were guilty!

“I can’t say ‘welcome back’ because y’all didn’t say ‘we’re back’ before surrounding those poor children! And all the kids—well, this is an orphanage, so if there were no kids and only old dudes, I would’ve burned the place down long ago. It would’ve been old news, burnt dudes! The first thing you shouted when you got back was ‘Little girls!’ What could be shadier?! When the only thing a suspicious person reacts to is little girls, they’re guaranteed to be reported, and captured, and found guilty in a court of law. That’s freaking suspicious! Only reacting to little girls, I mean—if we’re talking about reactions to females without chest development, then you’d think there would’ve been a bit of a bing-bang with Tiny Tanuki’s lack of big ba—ack, agggh!”

She bit me! A dangerous tiny animal attacked out of nowhere. A bing-bang in the middle of the orphanage… What sort of terrifying animals lurked in the corridors of this place?! *And can someone please remove this tiny animal’s jaws from my face? It’s starting to hurt.*

“We’re back!” the nerds shouted. “So can you please untie these ropes?”

The girls started pressing them about why they didn’t come back sooner. I mean, they should’ve known the answer to that? The girls let their long-withheld anger out.

Class Rep had to interpret the nonsense chatter of the four nerds and the incomprehensible babbling of the meatheads for me. How could she understand such illogical, bizarre speech patterns? *What a mystery…*
Uh, why did everyone start glaring at me?

“In conclusion, the Merchant Kingdom’s slave hunters have been decimated and the captured slaves released,” Class Rep said. “But they chased the ships that held the previously captured slaves into the port, started a naval battle, and just when they thought they were able to successfully free the slaves, Kakizaki-kun’s group boarded the enemy ship and went crazy. That was why they couldn’t come back at first. Then they went around rescuing all of the slaves from the sinking ships in the harbor…it took that long? Really? Then they saw the freed beastfolk off to a safe place, handed over all of the goods and resources they’d procured, and made their way back here. Is that correct?”

“How did you understand them?!” the girls gasped.

“It’s exactly what we told her!” the nerds shouted.

A flawless interpretation! Her ability there was unparalleled. Her skills probably surpassed Interpretation and Translation—no, surely she had Master Detective or Master Deduction!

How did Class Rep manage to cut through all the “beast ears,” and “so fluffy,” and “kidnapped,” and “I wanted to pet them!” and “I’m hungry,” and “heraldic designs,” and “rabbit ears,” and “no, the tails were the best part,” and “where’s the food, bruh!” and “we pursued those silky ears,” and “they were soooo amazing,” and “the furries were so scared,” and “Haruka-kun, gimme rice,” and “that’s when Kakizaki-kun went berserk mode,” and “that was our epic sudden charge,” and “so we made this cannon,” and “for some reason our magic bullets wouldn’t hit,” and “made pipes for Slimey,” and “yeah totally jiggly,” and “from, like, over there, well, the domains over there,” and “he shot out and…uh, what happened next?” and “so like, fluffy justice!” and “when we went to get them they were so scared,” and “their forest burned down,” and “I’m starving, dude, hurry up!” and “they lost everything,” and “that’s what happened”?! All nine of them talked at the same time, literally ten times more gibberish than that! And 90 percent of it was about beast ears and furry-this fluffy-that.

They were annoying, so I made them some food to shove in their yapping mouths. Naturally, I seated the meatheads the furthest I could away from the orphans and pushed the nerds into a different room.

“Haruka-kun, I’m sorry we didn’t make it in time,” Ota-kun said.

“The beast warriors fought with everything they had to save the children.”

“And they died in battle. We didn’t make it in time for them either.”

“I’m sorry to hear it,” I said.

“Yeah…”

I’d failed there too. I was glad the nerds went to save the beastfolk. But that wasn’t enough. In the end, I couldn’t protect everyone. The nerds understood well that they hadn’t made it in time. That they hadn’t saved everyone.

It would’ve been possible, but I’d overlooked them. I took action too late.

“By the way, who is that beautiful girl that chained us up?”

“A heavenly belly dancer sent down to earth?”

“And how did she instantly tie us up, nullifying my forcefield before I could even activate it?”

“The hot girls in this world are out of control!”

“Oh, you mean Dancer Girl?” I asked. “Oh, you know, it’s just… y’know, what happens, just the thing, and the other—you know. One thing leads to the next… And, uh…I enslaved her? Hee hee?”

“You did it *again*!”

“You’ll be punished!”

I couldn’t stick out my tongue like Miss Armor Rep could, apparently. I mean, she was so cute and naughty that I *had* to let stuff go. Hot girls have special powers, you know?

After introducing them to Dancer Girl, I made sure to keep them away from her. The nerds could infect her, after all. I also introduced the orphans to them, and then told the orphans to let me know right away if the nerds ever got close to them. They should be okay.

Whisper, whisper… “Just so you know, her name is Nefertiri-san, not Dancer Girl, okay?”

“I mean, we knew that her name wasn’t that, at least!”

"She seems incredibly strong… Well, I guess he saved the day?"

"More than just saved the day. He saved her and the orphans…and all of us."

"We had a rough time ourselves. I'm really sorry we didn't make it in time."

"No, we needed you out there. Haruka-kun was so happy for you, that you were fighting for your convictions."

"I see." Shh!

Class Rep was talking to the nerds. Lecturing them, I assumed. *Taste the terror of a lecture from Class Rep, you dweebs!* I got those at least fifteen times from twenty girls a day!

Now I understood how Slimey came flying back to the frontier. A Slimey cannon had been deployed. I equipped the nerds with magic projectiles and shells for naval warfare, but they were so stupid that they ended up lobbing them by hand and missing. How incompetent could these guys be? Then, they crafted a cannon to fire magic with and they started hitting the mark every time. Wait, how hyper-competent *were* they?! It was allegedly super difficult to stabilize a bevel on a rocking boat. How come their Dexterity stats only compensated for firing magic projectiles? Their nerdiness exceeded all statistical calculations.

Slimey sensed the danger and gave the nerds orders, telling them where to point the cannon, and then firing it with his own magic power. It resulted in a super-cluster of slimes raining down from the sky over here. Thus, the realm was saved. The distance between us and them had wiped us all out, but it'd all worked out in the end. Maybe Servitude helped overcome some of the gaps?

"And how were the beast ears and the fluffy fur?" I asked.

"They were scared of humans, so we tried not to get close to them," Ota-kun sighed.

"They were so furry, and we couldn't even speak to them…" the nerds wept.

How unfortunate. It was a rough rejection, but it made sense that the beastfolk could only see them as humans, even if the nerds *had* saved them.

Maybe things would've been different if they had gotten there earlier, but they didn't. The beastfolk feared and mistrusted humans as a result.

"Same with the villagers—well, the beastfolk villagers, anyway?"

"They stayed hidden, watching us from a distance. We put out the fires, dug graves, and then dropped off the captured beastfolk and stolen goods and left."

They didn't even talk with the beastfolk! I mean, yeah, this was the nerd brigade we were talking about, so I doubted they'd be able to properly communicate with anyone else even if given the opportunity. In the end, they'd destroyed the Merchant Kingdom's navy, and secured the safety of the Beast Kingdom. Even better, the Merchant Kingdom's main force was left in shambles. They wouldn't be able to strike back any time soon.

Plus, the nerds had somehow lost their nerdy auras. They were determined now. They didn't get exactly what they'd wanted, but they'd become heroes in this world. This terrible world didn't have what they wanted—but they had accepted that.

"Well, good work?" I said.

"Thanks. We're…back."

"Haruka, seconds over here."

"These buckets are puny, bruh!"

"Need more burgers!"

"I'll take a bucket of rice balls!"

"Where's the karaage?"

"Just give us seconds already, dude!"

They were being obnoxious again, but I got the sense I couldn't just bury the nerds anymore. Underground was reserved for old dudes. It wasn't too late to bury the meatheads, though. I'd feel bad for the underground dwellers in that case. Maybe they'd all get along? *Could be the perfect solution.*

DAY 75

NOON

All I did was try to sneak out to see a play about blackhaired bikini princesses and they got mad at me?

SOUVENIR SHOP

ORPHANAGE BRANCH

WE WEATHERED THE CHAOS of the boys' groups getting back, the accusations of suspicious behavior, and the real cause of panic amongst the girls—the manifestation of any maiden's nightmare, Sex God! Now, things were finally calming down.

An MP-drained Angelica-san and Nefertiri-san brought us the news: a beast of licentious mastery had been awoken. A sex god who could use techniques beyond mortal understanding. We cautiously asked for the details, and what we learned knocked us out one after another. It was both the force and the volume of his sex techniques that had toppled two Dungeon Emperor-level erotic sex queens. He toyed with them, deciphering and then assaulting their weaknesses from head to toe. *Unbelievable!*

"Shimazaki-san's group dress fitting was also crazy. They couldn't stand by the end of it."

"Don't tell me the Magic Hands have gotten even wilder."

"Oh no!"

Another tool had been placed in the hands of a Sex God.

"That's danger! Mind-blowing, pleasure!"

"More…danger, than death!"

Dress-fitting was nothing like what happened to Angelica-san and Nefertiri-san—all he was doing was taking measurements and adjusting the fabric. Even so, it was still that destructive?! If he attacked for real…

A tongue to the inguinal ligament… Nibbling on the anterior superior iliac crest… N-nibbling? N-n-n-n-naaaaaagh! (She overheated.)

Because of this, everyone had been glancing at Haruka-kun overflowing with fear and interest. Soon, though, things started returning to normal. A morning girls' meeting led by Nefertiri-san ended up being a short class in sexual technique mastery. It made everyone a little horny, but aside from that, we calmed down.

"If the two Dungeon Empresses couldn't take him on, then maybe the five of us…"

"No, you'd need at least ten for it to be even."

"Yeah, overwhelm him with ten and the techniques that we learned!"

Stroking with his fingertip so gentle that you're not quite sure you can feel it, and then taking it in his m-m-mou… (Maidenly KO.)

"Call a medic! Class Rep is having a fantasy again!"

"Somebody, shove one of those fat mushrooms into her mouth."

"On it."

Mmpfffft!

Anyway, we finally learned what happened with Oda-kun's group. Haruka-kun figured out that the Merchant Kingdom was targeting the Beast Kingdom. The Theocracy and Diorelle were both trying to get a monopoly on spellstones and mushroom production so they could raise prices and make massive profits. While those two countries were occupied, the Merchant Kingdom went after the beastfolk to corner the slave trade market. It was a wicked, far-reaching plan, but Haruka-kun disrupted it. The losses they incurred were back-breaking. To beat a union of merchants in a rip-off contest…that just meant that Haruka-kun was worse than the rest of them, didn't it?

"Oda-kun's group looks different, don't they?"

"It's because they killed for a purpose—to protect others."

"Meanwhile, we just fended off monsters again."

"Even if that god guy says it's impossible, Haruka-kun hasn't given up on sending us back to our own world yet. And he wants to pull it off

without having any of us kill another human being."

That was his real goal.

"But what about the boys? And Haruka-kun himself…"

"That's right, he can't just…"

"The boys don't want to go back," Book Club Pres said. "They've decided to stay here."

"Wha—are you serious?"

"So if we go back, then…"

"That's right!" said Vice Rep B. "So we've gotta, like, decide what to do before Haruka-kun finds out how to send us back! What should we do?"

There was no way he could do it. Accomplish something that even an apparent god, with magnitudes of power beyond his own, couldn't do. This guy bowed his head in apology for being unable to perform such miracles yet. It was impossible, but impossible didn't exist for Haruka-kun. That was why he would lecture god until that god fell prostrate before us.

We would have to choose for ourselves. Make our own decisions. It wouldn't be a matter of *can't go home*, it would have to be *won't* go home.

In the meantime, prosperity. Goods production had flourished as a result of Haruka-kun's return, and the souvenir shop was busy from the second it opened every morning. New customers found us from all across the kingdom via the mom network. Women's clothing flew off the shelves, and thanks to the play the kingdom was putting on, the same went for the I ❤ FRONTIER line. Hadn't those been a huge success back in Omui, though…?

"If it's that popular, I kinda want to see it."

"But doesn't it involve black-haired maidens in bikinis?"

"And in it, Haruka-kun makes the maidens fight and hide in the fortress."

"It's better than what really happened! Remember? The old-dude massacre? And that field of bamboo shoots…that's blasphemy to our Japanese cultural heritage!"

“Miss Merielle fought in the Imperial Guard, but in the play, she takes on the entire legion of Theocracy knights by herself.”

Judging from what we could pick up from customers, the play didn’t have much to do with what actually happened. It was just a loose series of events starring some of the same people.

In the play, a mysterious strategist sent the warrior maidens off to battle while capturing the enemies in a trap from the fortress. In reality, that strategist was on the frontlines, brutalizing enemies in close combat.

“In the play, Lady Murimour saves him from the fortress and helps him escape after the enemy infiltrates it.”

“Nope. He just ran around the fortress murdering everyone in sight. That strategist is way too dangerous to interfere with when he’s on a roll.”

“Didn’t he say he was trying to escape the old-man stink?”

“Did he really need saving from that?”

“We can never know what really happens anytime any of them fight —Haruka-kun, Angelica-san, Slimey, or Nefertiri-san!”

We didn’t understand anything about that most-dangerous foursome. They were the ones who deserved acclaim, but their stories barely came through in the play. The play hid the truth of who the kingdom’s savior really was. In fact, he was turned into the clown for the audience’s amusement. There was hardly any entertainment in this world, so we all wanted to go see it. The bikinis were kind of embarrassing, but we could just hide our distinctive hair and go see it incognito… Still, we’d probably just get annoyed if we watched it. Diorelle finally found happiness; they deserved a play. But we’d end up screaming in shame. Yes, peace had arrived…but I couldn’t stand that Haruka-kun, the one who actually brought peace to the kingdom, wasn’t going to get any credit. I couldn’t go see it. I didn’t need to see it to know I’d end up feeling bitter. We couldn’t stand it, but we had to accept it. No one would end up knowing the truth. Haruka-kun himself never even brought it up. But why make people sneer at him? Now the world would be full of people who looked at Haruka-kun and laughed. He tried so hard to make everyone happy, so why did he have to become the fool? We couldn’t see that play. We couldn’t. We’d end up burning the theater to the ground.

Even now, Haruka-kun was making us ballroom gowns as if there was no danger, suffering through trial and error. He twisted himself in any shape necessary to protect anyone he could, and he acted as though nothing was wrong. Maybe that made him a fool—maybe it even made him crazy. But that clown was the person who saved this world. People who didn't save anyone don't have the right to laugh at the one person who suffered and scraped to save every last person he could. I knew it wasn't just fiction, I knew it was just a play, but if I saw it…I'd lose my mind.

No battle armor on my dress, please! No chains, at the very least? And take off the thorns and shoulder pads. I *definitely* didn't need a drill! This was a ball, not a dungeon, so remove the pile-bunker gun while you're at it too!

DAY 75

EVENING

If the nerds have lost their nerdiness, then I may as well burn the rest?

SOUVENIR SHOP

ORPHANAGE BRANCH

IT WAS STUPID AND ANNOYING, but I made the nerdlords tuxedos. Once they put them on, the results were not good. Well, the designs and the fits were perfect. They were ready-made goods from patterns, but they were exclusively for the nerd gang, so I doubted there'd be any complaints. The problem was the models themselves!

With the idea that anyone could look nice with the right clothes, I whipped up tuxedos for the bulging, muscular meatheads. To my displeasure, they'd been receiving fan letters all morning. I supposed they had fine faces. The biggest problem was what lay *inside* their heads…or didn't, for that matter. Besides that, the reception was great. So why did this happen? I swore I could hear the theme from *The Godfather* playing somewhere. Yup, they looked like the damn mafia! Once they were all dressed up and in a room together, the meatheads looked more dangerous than handsome. They definitely wouldn't be allowed into the king's dungeon like this. They'd get taken into custody. Fuhgeddaboudit!

And that problem wasn't necessarily *not* unexpected, but the real shocking thing was with the nerds. The nerds had also gotten pretty jacked since coming here, so you'd *think* there wouldn't be any problem with the fit, but… Why did they look so freaking shady? They seriously looked like a group of scheming con-artist masterminds. Their hair had all grown out, so the combo made them look downright suspicious.

"I don't think this feels right?"

Well, I made them their tuxedos, so screw it. The moment they tried to enter the king's dungeon, the guards would capture them. That was fine

with me. *In fact, that may very well be the right call.*

Meanwhile, the girls were still undecided about their dresses, so they hadn't put in their orders. Looking at the status of their designs, they were still a long way off. Were they all scared of Magic Hands or something? Yikes. This was sheer speculation, but since Magic Hands were a magical substance, did their proximity to Magic Entanglement end up imbuing my other skills into them? If that was the case, there was a chance that Sex God and Lascivious had merged into them. I couldn't turn any of my skills off, so there was nothing to be done about it.

They shouldn't need any more bottoms, at least. I could whip up any new orders based on their previous sizes. I had to adopt that as a policy, 'cause measuring bottoms was way too dangerous. The girls losing their cool like that was going to result in all sorts of percolating problems of a penetrative nature.

"Measurements for a dress and a matching garter belt *should* be fine, but judging from Miss Armor Rep's and Dancer Girl's reactions yesterday… The excessive reaction of erogenous ecstasy means that it is in fact…*not* fine?"

It felt amazing on my end to touch and rub so many places at the same time, but apparently it felt out of control if you were on the receiving end. Their expressions and body movements flew out of control into an uncontrollable roly-poly gurgling. None of them had the necessary defenses for such attacks. They couldn't block a relentless parade of fully powered sexual techniques launched from a teenage boy who was lost in the thrilling thrall of it all? *Was I losing control too? Oops.*

"Lectures every morning, Miss Armor Rep telling me she thought she was gonna die… Well, the only danger for me is going to heaven. I almost lost all my HP myself!"

Yesterday I drained every last drop of MP getting this and that from this side to that side, resulting in a RE: Loop rippling rampage of relentless attacks that sent me straight to heaven. I was pinned against a two-headed front of voluptuous heaven and hell! I literally almost ran out of HP! Okay, forget that, what's up with the nerdarinos?

"You guys look so bummed out with that long, messy hair," I said. "I'm just tryin' to do you guys a solid and burn it off. When you resist out

of resentment you just end up with this mess of a do, ya know? Here, lemme burn it!"

"No burning! How about a *haircut* instead?"

"By the way, your hair hasn't grown at all, Haruka-kun. Actually, your hairstyle looks a little different."

"Yeah, 'cause I cut it? Like a normal person?"

I hated going for haircuts, so I got used to doing my own hair. I was good with scissors and a razor. *I like my hair shaggy.*

"Please," one nerd begged me. "Just give me a normal haircut. Do you even have scissors?"

"Yes, I'll slash your hair…in a single stroke!"

I needed to aspire towards Miss Armor Rep's single-stroke Flash Attack. For their hair it wasn't realistic, but maybe for their throats… *Ack!*

"W-w-wait a second!"

"This is not the haircut I was expecting!"

What?! An instantaneous forcefield?! These nerds sure had improved their skills. They taught me how to seal skills, but they wouldn't let me seal away forcefield. Bunch of cheapskates.

"Didn't you just say 'slash', not 'cut'?"

"In a single stroke? Don't use Angelica-san's famous finishing skill to cut our hair, please!"

"Why are you crouched that low, anyway—hey, your razor wasn't at hair-height, it was at neck-height!"

"Can you leave my sideburns on?"

"Ugh," I groaned, "you're telling me I have to give each of you a haircut one at a time? If it was your heads, I could chop them all off at once…"

It wasn't much fun to give guys a haircut, so I decided to have a good innocent time and go for the necks…but now that was off the table?

"We'll pay you, so just give us normal haircuts!"

"*Business*, you say?! Well, then! Let's get these haircuts going!"

Now that I was getting compensated, this was work, and that meant I had to give them legitimate haircuts. Damn. Oh, well. *I think mohawks would look nice on them? Hi-yah?*

I launched some balls of water at their heads. I held myself back and cut only their hair and thinned it out. After restoring some balance, I started to shorten and style it with scissors. Magic Hands were busy handling twelve combs each, sixteen razors, and eight scissors.

"Y'all are nerds and stuff, so I figure this is fine… Huh? Where'd your nerdiness go?!"

"Our nerdiness?!"

"Oh wow! Yeah, this is…kinda embarrassing!"

The nerds usually went to barber shops. Barbers specialize in matching the length of the hair according to the shape of one's head, and so they typically opted for the easiest styles, putting appearance second to utility. Meanwhile, a salon hairdresser will cut one's hair to maximize appearance without regard for utility. I went for the salon approach, which meant the nerds didn't look like nerds at all. *They've lost their nerdiness!*

"Hey, we've been cutting our own hair! Not fair, not fair, not fair!" the girls shouted.

"You guys look so stylish!"

"We don't want to be stylish!"

"Yeah, this is super embarrassing!"

"But I think you guys look totally, like, so good?"

"Agreed, this is much better."

"Yeah, you don't look unfashionable anymore."

"The cuts really bring out the best of their faces."

"They're at least 50 percent hotter!"

"He did a fade that easily? And so skillfully!"

"That was a full-on pro haircut job!"

“You guys look great! Your faces really shine through.”

“Now they just need to dye their hair and they’ll be full-on playboys!”

“It actually would low-key work with them.”

“Are they gonna be playboy nerds now?”

“No, we are not!” the nerds shouted.

“Yeah, I’m down with this new look. They’ve got the shining youth vibe.”

“So perfect!”

The nerds were bright red at being surrounded by the girls and showered in praise. Maybe now they’d start to take better care of their appearance? *Sounds like an opportunity to rake in some clothing profits!*

The nerds were too opposed to anything to do with our old world. That was why they kept a distance from the rest of the class. It made sense—they spent their lives dreaming of a fantasy world. Now they were actually here, they might even be able to meet local girls and… *Uh, should I be reporting this to the authorities?*

“Haruka, gimme a haircut too!” said Kakizaki-kun.

“People with long hair, deal with it yourselves!”

“But I’ve been so bummed about my hair lately.”

“Then cut it short!” I snapped.

“But long hair isn’t that difficult, you just tie it up.”

“Oh, some bondage, eh?”

“*What the hell kind of hairstyle is that?!”*

I guess I could do some more ripping off. Maybe that would soften these hostile mafia vibes. They looked straight up evil in their tuxedos! I tried giving them overcoats and all I could picture was them whipping out shotguns?

I sliced, shaved, chopped, razed, and slashed away at their hair, and then did the orphans’ while I was at it. The people here had mostly curly hair, which was harder to cut. The orphan girls in particular had a lot of

requests. They wanted to be like princesses, apparently? *What, so you want to sell hamburgers?* Next up I'd have them learn the princess method of having a temper tantrum.

"You're all so cute now!"

"Really?!"

"Yeah, adorable!"

"Woohoo!"

"You're like angels!"

"Yaaaaay!"

Jiggle jiggle!

I was glad that they were happy, but I was completely unqualified for hairdressing. Regular dressing too, for that matter. I was a self-studied barber… *Hang on, why are the girls drawing hairstyles now too?!* I wasn't gonna do those! Actually, I was getting the sinking feeling I definitely *was* gonna have to do them, but these illustrations were way too specific! And I for sure couldn't do perms! *Maybe I'll make and sell some hot hair curlers though?*

I started preparing another buffet-style meal (for whatever reason), but my hair salon business didn't show any signs of dwindling. My Magic Hands never actually touched any hair so it was perfectly sanitary, but now I had to heat up the bath at the same time. As everyone finished with work for the day, they rushed around chaotically.

"Do you want me to braid your hair too?"

"Yes please!"

"And me!"

"I want manju, Big Bro!"

"Yes, 'Big Bro,' how about three dresses?"

"I want long hair!"

"I wanna be a princess!"

"O glorious 'Big Bro,' I'd *love* a kimono!"

“Whaa! All the kids call Haruka-kun Big Bro! They’re so close!”

“Broseph, we’re fresh outta karaage.”

“I’ll wash the dishes.”

“Ooh, I can help!”

“Just make my hair a little shorter, please.”

“Hey, ‘Big Bro,’ where are those chestnut manju you promised?”

“Haruka, I’m friggin starvin’ over here, man.”

“Okay, so, um…uh, do my hair just like hers!”

“I could do with a French braid myself.”

“Hurry up!” (Ensuing chaos omitted.)

Why can’t I shake the feeling I’m more of a dog groomer than a hair stylist? Anyway—next up, Tiny Tanuki wanted a poodle cut.

DAY 75

NIGHT

The advice columnists are always saying not to eat sweets if you want a flat stomach… Dream on!

SOUVENIR SHOP

ORPHANAGE BRANCH

GIRLS' MEETING

A SEDUCTIVE ATMOSPHERE hung heavy in the bath. The kids had finished bathing. Now the grown-ups were practicing sex techniques as taught by the masters themselves…but what an intimidating experience! And all that experience was with just a single person… *Gulp!*

"Pet, stroke, rub."

We practiced on one another's forearms under the instruction of Nefertiri-san. Yes, this was a valuable lesson from the heroine once felled by the abominable Sex God himself!

"Oh, so petting is just moving your hand across the skin with a light touch, but stroking adds a bit of pressure?"

"And rubbing feels like moving the muscles themselves. I get it!"

"Under the tongue, lots of saliva, lick?"

…Slurp!

And to practice…you know, we each had a mushroom! After practicing, we ate them as snacks.

"The kids were really thrilled with their haircuts, weren't they?"

"The kids, yes, Haruka-kun was surprisingly good."

Haruka-kun cut all the kids' hair and they'd been in very high spirits after. The kids only had each other before, so they were overjoyed to have

others to rely on. They had people to take care of them and to spoil them. They looked so happy they could cry.

Delicious food was happiness. Nice clothes were happiness; a warm, clean house was happiness too. We could give them a happy place. Not a home, but a place that fulfilled all of their physiological needs. A place where they could just *be*. Wherever Haruka-kun was, the kids went.

Also impressive were Oda-kun and his friends' haircut transformations. Just how deep did Haruka-kun's knowledge go? Apparently, he had always cut his own hair, but that shouldn't have resulted in sudden expertise in styling hair for other people.

Kakizaki-kun's group also got haircuts, but since they wanted to keep it long, Haruka-kun just thinned it out and did some styling. Just that small change turned them from raggedy to fashionable. We girls had been cutting each other's hair, but Haruka-kun was on another level. The scissors balanced so deftly in his hands. The results were beautiful and natural, and his customers' hair still had plenty of volume. He said he was going to craft a hair iron next, to the delight of Shimazaki-san and her friends.

Earlier today, we enjoyed our buffet dinner, helped clean up, then got the kids in the bath. After that, we had our one-more-set and belly dancing sesh before adult time. Yesterday's DDR session worked out our legs, and belly dancing really did wonders for our abs. It used muscles we wouldn't normally use, so we saw results faster. *Supposedly, it narrows the waist and lifts up the butt!* Tomorrow, we'd have a dance lesson to help with footwork.

The present content of the lecture that had overtaken our girls' bath meeting was rapidly approaching the danger zone. Angelica-san was describing in detail the effects. The effects of, well, when *this* happens or *that* happens, as in licking or lip-tracing and the ensuing reaction in gripping, mimetic detail. *I'm sinking!*

"Must defeat first. If not, this," she said.

"What is that? Dying? Losing your mind?"

"Right away, swoon."

"Eeeeeeep!" (Frothing.)

There was no way to defend yourself from such attacks. Going on an overwhelming offensive was the only option. If you didn't, you would die. Well, you would lose your mind and faint, apparently? *What a terrifying Sex God!*

"Consciousness, memory, blank."

"Eeeeeek!" (Burbling.)

The maidens were drowning in the bath, so it was time to retreat to our rooms. Erailia-san joined the meeting after putting the kids to sleep, but couldn't handle the hands-on aspect of the lessons, it being her first time and all. She keeled over in the bath, her cheeks bright red. She soon popped back up, cheeks as red as ever, but listening attentively to every detail.

Desperate to hear what happened next, we spent ages combing our hair. Haruka-kun gave us haircuts and brushes, after all, and they were expensive! Might as well enjoy them.

Next, we put on the leotards and hairbands that he sold to us as sets and moved to the bedroom. It was time for a practical demonstration!

"Pinned down and starting by kissing at the toes?!"

"Wha, whaa?! Finding every weak point and nibbling it?!"

"B-but being pinned down by tentacles must feel all squirmy…"

"They're vibrating and moving around, too! Being pinned down must've meant that their whole bodies were shaking!"

A new monster had spawned in this fantasy world. Its skills were incomprehensible. This monster beat the biggest bosses of them all, even when outnumbered.

"It felt like *that* just getting touched with his fingertips? Lascivious is insane!"

"All the tentacles have special effects, too? So the Sex God is a tentacled Demon King!"

"They have adhesion?! If you don't attack first, you'd be pinned down, vibrating all over…"

"And Revival Lv7 means nonstop! Regrowth!"

Why did I get the sense that this regrowing eggplant wasn't edible? Still, instant revival was intense. That meant you couldn't win an endurance battle. You'd slowly get overwhelmed. Combining infinite endurance with the intensity of those attacks equaled an unbeatable machine. *So that's a Sex God!*

"Buuuuut," grinned Vice Rep B, "speaking of Revival, don't you also have that, Class Rep?"

"She does!" everyone shouted.

"So Class Rep takes the attacks while the rest of us go on the offensive!"

"You haaave to, Class Rep! Just keep using Revival and let it aaaalll pour into you."

"So…she'd lose her mind, but without the fainting?"

"Her body would be in tentacle hell."

"She'd melt away!"

"Why am I the only defense? Don't lay me at his feet like an offering!"

I never agreed to fight in the first place! M-m-melting?!

"M-m-me? T-taking *all* the attacks? Lascivious-imbued tentacles, vibrating all over my body—I, I, I… No way! P-plus, his t-t-tongue would be…licking… Licking?! And nibblinnnnnnnng…" (*Uurrrrrf...)*

"Medic, get the mushrooms!"

Fwump!

"Poor Class Rep."

"This is gonna be a tough battle."

"No kidding."

We all thought the play that portrayed Haruka-kun as a clown was ridiculous. That didn't get rid of my frustration. Haruka-kun, on the other hand, went to see the play without any sort of remorse! And not because he was a champion of the arts— it was for the bikini babes!

With their spirits renewed and their hearts determined from watching the play, Angelica-san and Nefertiri-san went off to Haruka-kun's bedroom in their matching skintight minidresses. The battle could start at any moment. If they wanted to show their gratitude to him so badly, why were they preparing to fight him? They were just trying to prove their appreciation, but instead they ended up losing every night in furious, no-holds-barred pro-wrestling matches.

Tonight the battlefield would be ablaze, a boiling furnace of roiling lust, a never-ending war. It was one thing to have sex with a partner whom you respected and loved with all your heart. Why hold these vicious two-on-one sex wars? Aside from them being really hot, of course.

DAY 75

NIGHT

Since when did Jupiter Eye turn into Naked Bod Eye?

SOUVENIR SHOP

ORPHANAGE BRANCH

I MANUFACTURED SOME new anklets to test out. I designed them so they could be used for belly dancing. They had lots of dangling charms and three effects: Speed-Up, Evasion, and Blinding Step. Up until now, I was limited to the number of effects I could graft into items based on the type of spellstone. But now that all of my abilities had shot up, I could do more. *The side jobs never end, huh?*

"There's really such a big difference in maturity when you go from the teens into the twenties, and so on, but I think this is unprecedented."

Jiggle jiggle.

There was a new industrial revolution of Wisdom. Combined with the prowess of Magic Hands, my precision, speed, and control had all improved. Most importantly, I could control things more easily. These were transcendental skills; it was no wonder they had naturally stayed hidden. Now that I'd unleashed them, they could kill me if I didn't control them properly. It turned out that'd been the case for a while. Whatever!

All this meant that it was time to update my classmates' equipment. Time for some serious upgrades. My goal was to help them survive, after all?

"Which means…I have to make *more* bras?! After all that struggle? With all of these changes to my manufacturing, I should really take new measurements and start from scratch. Can the girls survive these tentacles?"

Jiggle jiggle.

I would have to stick to tops—no bottoms or garter belts. Equipment took the first priority anyhow. Normally, nothing would be better than the

big dungeon items powered up with mithril, but the *dresses* I was making now were stronger than most dungeon equipment at this point. I needed to rethink my entire approach to equipment. Combine that with the more difficult techniques in *Let's Go Magic Items!* that I had been too scared to explore… *I'm never going to run out of work, am I?*

"I've also got the *Blacksmith's Alchemy Manual*, so maybe I can make some proper equipment for once?"

Even though my production speed had increased, more difficult procedures meant more overtime. I thought I was finally out of the woods! But first things first, *rings*. I wanted to improve their status ailment-resistance. Why did it seem like improving the brilliance of the spellstones' cuts wasn't going to help with that?

I could just approach it as practice, I supposed. It seemed like a waste of high-rank spellstones, but the girls really wanted the jewelry. They could never wear jewelry back in school, and they said they needed them now. That was good enough reason to do it. I had extra spellstones, anyhow.

"It is kind of a waste though, since we could always use more MP batteries," I sighed.

Wiggle wiggle.

At least fighting dungeons was a lot more profitable than war. The spellstones and equipment we could find there were valuable.

"Make a ring with a spellstone, and polish it white… What do I do with the raw rock? I could try to make diamonds, but those have limited uses. They have strong defense against sudden attacks and can maintain sustained blows… I suppose keeping the basic effects from the raw spellstones should be more than enough. Still, this feels so wasteful?"

I decided to go with diamonds, per the girls' requests. I had over a hundred, so twenty-two diamond rings weren't a huge deal—it was better than using high-rank spellstones, though I did have a mountain of those.

If I could go dungeon raiding every day, then there would be no such thing as scarcity. In fact, I'd probably have *too much* of everything. Having to consume all my resources on this felt wrong though, I had to admit.

At present, I had an incredible sum of money—stacks on stacks on stacks—but not much use for it. I still needed money, but raw materials were more valuable. I had already bought all the most valuable goods in the capital, including diamonds. You'd think with all of my improved abilities I'd go to work making something like sniper rifles…but nope, just rings. After everything I bought, the girls just wanted diamonds. Oh, and they wanted imbued status ailment-resistance and explosive power on them too.

"I could make the band larger, but I wanna make the diamonds stand out? The girls are going to be wearing dresses and gloves. If they're wearing rings on their gloves, then I need something a bit tougher, right?"

Jiggle jiggle.

I finished pinning together three sample dresses in the most-requested styles—mermaid, princess, and frilly. From those basic shapes sprung endless variations…and endless indecision on the girls' parts.

Hence the samples. The girls were probably fretting and fussing over their dress designs at this very moment. *Speaking of which, Class Rep seems to need a restoration mushroom for some reason?* Why was there steam coming out of her ears? Better give her a long, thick one.

While I was making samples, I whipped together some lace gloves, frilly garter belts, low-heeled pumps, and lace-embroidered veils in a few variations. In Miss Armor Rep and Dancer Girl's sizes, of course! I set them to red and blue, but they were all multicolor, so the girls could request them in white. For some reason they all wanted white! Was this some kingdom fad?

"The only problem is that those two have dangerous dynamite figures, especially in the, ahem, *torso* area. As in, they're sexy? So sexy?"

Let's forget about the part where I slipped in some stroking. After some dirty deeds and side jobs occurring simultaneously, the two figures themselves finally appeared.

"We're…back," said Miss Armor Rep.

"Return, bedroom, together," said Dancer Girl.

"Welcome back! Did you have a good time? I'm finishing up some work, but just let me know if you want anything. I can fit them to your

measurements and customize them however you like. Those dresses are for you two, so show the other girls tomorrow, ’kay?”

The two of them instantly focused on the dresses. I think their eyes got drunk on those dresses. I guess two Dungeon Emperor-class warriors could tell how strong the effects on the equipment were.

I found a good time to stop my work for the night, and it just so happened to be the moment the two of them got into bed and looked in my direction. I wanted to go over there, but if I did there’d be no coming back. That’d be eating the food of the underworld—take a bite and I could never return to the realm of the living! A one-way ticket to the next world that I’d be more than happy to purchase!

I mustered all the restraint I could. I needed to ensure my goods were high-quality and defect-free, after all. I watched them the whole time with Jupiter Eye. They were wearing tight minidresses, and tangling their long legs together, and glancing in my direction—there were a volley of arrows fired my way, striking a fire in my teenage-boy heart and activating my instincts. *Sheesh, they really got me?*

Yes, Wisdom shouldered a substantial burden. It had to deal with so many skills and tasks, so concentrating too hard on any one thing made me feel uncomfortable and dizzy. I still wanted to make final improvements to my goods. These wares were protecting the lives of my classmates! I was more than willing to suffer a little discomfort on my end…which was only getting aggravated by the lurid glances from the bed! *It’s a trap!*

“Sitting with your knees up in tight minidresses—u-unbelievable!”

They slowly, ever-so-*slowly* opened their legs, glancing in my direction, forming shapes with their legs that clearly meant *come here*. This was a resistance-immune teenage-boy trap! They must’ve endowed the attack with Temptation!

Miss Armor Rep wore a skintight, off-shoulder minidress with black knee socks all the way up to her glistening white thighs, leaving a gap just below the dress of sheer, unbearable temptation. Next to her, Dancer Girl was wearing a high-neck, sleeveless, skintight minidress, showing off the full length of her wobbling, thick brown thighs through black see-through stockings. The stimulating, seductive steaminess was storming my way!

It's the seduction magic of monotone! My resistances were nullified! What a scandalous design! I may have been the one who made it, but how could you do this to me, my sweet design?! *I made you!*

Naked Bod Eye had started its recording sesh long ago. Wisdom was on top of the task. It knew its job. Hang on, since when did Jupiter Eye get renamed as Naked Bod Eye?! *It's Jupiter Eye—right?* The new name might be accurate for now, but I did use it for other things!

Just like that, my hand entered the mystical Bermuda Triangle. With a puff of air, their glances had pulled me fully into their attack radius… *The bottoms are another monotone attack, this time in white!* I was defenseless against them!

"Can I, put on, new anklet?"

"Put them…on me…"

They extended their long, beautiful legs towards me… *A-a-a-a-aaaankleeeets?!* On these legs?! (Teenage-boy super beam blast!)

It went without saying, but Sex God leveled up that night. It wouldn't be long before Sex God achieved a level far beyond the maximum!

DAY 76

MORNING

We're gonna need a space expedition to get my sex appeal back.

SOUVENIR SHOP

ORPHANAGE BRANCH

I WAS SHORT on sleep, but it was a beautiful morning. Looked like the beautiful sights from last night blew me right out of bed and burst Revival up to Lv7. After a series of nonstop, repetitive revival battles, eventually I couldn't keep up and was defeated in the night. When I woke up, I was bound to the bed in chains! Dancer Girl's chains!

"Wh-what a scheme! I mean, what a dream! Ya know?"

This was revenge for using Unlimited Magic Hands in last night's hellfire wonderland of Lascivious-imbued roleplay!

Miss Armor Rep and Dancer Girl rubbed the raw mushroom with their tongues from both sides, gobbling it both up at the same time for a marvelous breakfast, and for seconds they went for the wholesale slaughter of an endlessly reviving teenage boy. *All right! I'm awake, already!*

Afterward, the two of them rushed off to the dining hall in good spirits (for *some* reason). They made *me* late too! At least they were happy. I guess they were pleased they'd gotten their revenge? The revenge of the teenage boy would be riled up and ready for action tonight in the grand cutting of Gordian knots, AKA going at it! *Looks like Princess Girl and Merimeri-san have joined the others for a girls' meeting?*

"Ohhhh em geeee, so beautiful, so perfect! Lovely and enchanting!"

Miss Armor Rep and Dancer Girl were presenting the dresses I finished for them yesterday. The girls and children alike were making a commotion. The guys…yeah, their senses were gone with the wind? Maybe they'd left their cerebellums in the antebellum! Although if they did, *that* film definitely wouldn't have won any awards.

Princess Girl and Merimeri-san were enthralled over the dresses. I supposed I could give them their salary in dress form, but that meant I'd have to measure them. That'd cause all kinds of problems!

The girls were in the middle of explaining the experience of getting measured. Their faces were bright red, but they were super into the underwear talk. Oh no, Vice Rep *B* was the one showing off! She was as dangerous as they came! *This* is the most popular girl in our class?! *I can see why. All the jiggling and all.*

(*Jiggle jiggle.*)

She pulled down her shirt to show off the bra. Meanwhile, the boys disintegrated! They were reduced to dust and clogged up the atmosphere. You'd need some serious filtration to clean up this mood.

"Haruka-san, make them for us too!"

"We'll work for them!"

Those bras were gaudy enough that Princess Girl and Merimeri-san were bound to want them. I had already given them dresses, though! Princess Girl got a super sexy dress, and both of them were in pink. Some seriously colorful nobles!

I had to take measurements from the first thing in the morning. Normally, there was nothing wrong with that, but I had the feeling this could cause some problems, a few incidents, and a sizeable uproar. I may as well do Maid Girl's while I was at it too. She was Princess Girl's double, so they should have the same size. *I'm sure it'll come in handy in general to have her measurements on file.*

"B-b-b-b-but, the princess, naked… That, that's unacceptable! A severe crime! Execution would be far too lenient for such an indecent deed! Arrest him under the special sex-crime law!"

"Er, no, you don't get it? Miss Armor Rep blindfolds me, so logically I shouldn't be able to see so it's fine! Though honestly, I don't know why I haven't fired her yet. My eyesight keeps improving and improving!
A Dungeon Empress is a completely incompetent blindfold. My teenage-boy willpower won't ever surrender to her incompetent blindfolding, so we're kinda at an impasse? Ya know?"

How exactly I ended up employing a blindfolder who let the blindfold slip down to my mouth—one whose fingers literally tried to pull my eyes open—and hadn't fired her yet? Those were mysteries. The power of the Dungeon Emperor must've just overwhelmed me. I should've fired her a long time ago!

"Very well. I accept!" the two of them shouted.

"You better not look," hissed Maid Girl. "The second you open your eyes, I'll gouge them out!"

I was more worried about my eyelids getting pulled off than my eyeballs getting gouged out. Wait, would Miss Armor Rep holding my eyelids open make it easier to pluck out my eyeballs?!

"Please tell that to my blindfold," I said to her. "More like, why is she grabbing my head and forcing me to look forward when I can do the job perfectly facing the wall? And why do I still employ her as my blindfold in spite of her suspicious incompetence? She's more of an exhibitionist assistant than a blindfolder, so seriously, ask her!"

Then, Magic Hands. *Activate.* Oh, screams of terror? Those were screams straight out of Buddhism's Eight Cold Hells. Although maybe agonized screams of terror fit the Four Hot Hells better? Whatever, unbearable agonized screaming arose from the squirming screechers. In short, it was crazy.

"Nnngggaaaaagh! Ah! Ah! Agh! Gaaaaaagh!" *Kaplunk.*

"Eep, eek, eeeeeerg, no, ack, eeeeeeeeegh!" *Kafwump.*

"Waaaaagh! Waaagh! No, wait, ack, eerrffm…" *Kawhomp.*

I sent a massive wave of Magic Hands to do the measuring, so many that I couldn't keep it up for long. Trying to get it over with that quickly just made it way more intense. I couldn't even maintain it for one minute!

Problem was, now that the girls were knocked out, it was hard to finish up. I guess I was used it by now, since it happened every time. Yeah, I had to hang them up.

Dancer Girl came up with a good solution and bound their hands with chains to hold their arms up. She even stood them up for me. *Thanks, Dancer Girl?* Something felt really, really wrong about this, but at least it

was easy to finish measurements. They'd probably flip out when they woke up, so I quickly made the remaining measurements and adjustments. The only problem was…well, now I had a sex-appeal problem that was visible from space. How could this be?

The stinging physical temptation of Princess Girl and her double's busty bodies was already a serious distraction. My Magic Hands soldiered on as they slipped, swooped, and scrubbed all over their skin, whipping together their underwear and base for a dress. They were going to get gorgeous, gaudy dresses with frills, garter belts, and gloves to match. Once they woke up, I'd get their opinions on the fit and make adjustments accordingly.

Merimeri-san was still in her early teens, but she certainly had more there than Vice Rep A or C. She'd add a lot more during puberty. Big was getting bigger. I made a frilly princess-line dress with a drape attached via hidden button for a luxurious look. All that remained were small tweaks to the fit and balance. Still, I felt like I shouldn't think about the consequences of feeling up a junior-high-aged girl, buck naked and suspended by chains? That's definitely a crime. But I hadn't taken her clothes off! I was *making* her clothes and putting them on, so I was definitely innocent.

Since they were already suspended and all, I decided to make them some shoes. All done for the time being, and it only took fifteen minutes! That was fast, but I'd been too aggressive in the process.

The underwear, dresses, and fitting were all complete, and I could handle the shoes, gloves, veils, and frills after they woke up. Once they woke up, there'd be no more problems! Except for the obvious ones—I mean, the chains and stuff.

"Like, chaining up the unconscious princess, her maid, and the duke's daughter feels all savage, and brutal, and vile enough to destroy my sex appeal for a million billion years—enough force to shoot my sex appeal so far into space I'm liable to never see it again. Not to mention enough to send me shooting away from these three girls. Why would I possibly feel this way?"

I just wanted to make them clothes, after all! I said I'd make 'em! But making them sent my sex appeal shooting away at a speed of 299,792,458 meters per second. *Once it hits 300 million, it's all over.*

I was finally going to finish the girls' dresses tonight. I even had the noble girls set up and ready. I supposed that meant we were ready to raid the king's dungeon for the ball battle tomorrow? I'd leave that decision to Mr. Meridad.

The equipment was completed, so the question was what the nobles would do. The defeated nobles had already been purged from the capital and their authority transferred over to the remaining, upstanding nobles. Now, with the king in charge, all was peaceful. There were a few enemies remaining, but since the power structure had been consolidated, they couldn't cause much trouble. Their plans wouldn't see the light of day. The political situation was a little more complicated outside the capitol. The oldest prince was still aligned with the four great noble houses, but that pig faction had been crushed to dust. Then the second prince's monkey faction was around in name, but they'd been fully and effectively neutralized. Only two of the four great houses had actually joined the rebellion, so the king was still allied with the other two who'd stayed loyal.

The course had been set for the kingdom. The nobles had two choices: pledge their fealty, or try to worm out of it. If they weren't loyal to the king, they were enemies, and enemies would be apprehended and destroyed either by force or by economic coercion. Politics were just a fancy dress-up game hiding the real power plays.

And I was *still* waiting. Despite putting up posters all over the souvenir shop, I still hadn't gotten my sexy female assassin! I was *still* waiting for her to show up and try to kill me in my sleep!

"I feel so bad for the princess girls! Maybe if I stuff some mushrooms in their mouths, it'll perk them up? Uh, is that better?"

That looked even shadier for some reason! It was an intense look! And maybe one that wasn't fit for a demure maiden? *I hope you girls can still get married after this.*

"Haruka-kun," called Class Rep. "You'd better start making some maternity clothes next… Wh-what are you doing to those girls?! You're guilty! Apprehended!"

I didn't blame her for her suspicion this time, I got the sense the girls were going to get mad at me, and boy, did they! I got hauled off, caught red-handed!

“What do you have to say for yourself?!” the girls demanded.

Not this again! Why did I have to influence them to see my innocence when my guilt was obviously expelled from my teenage boy body on a nightly basis?!

“I’m *telling* you guys,” I groaned. “They asked me to make them clothes, so I did! Fitting is hard when you’re on the ground, right? So good ol’ Dancer Girl over here lent me a hand and suspended them with chains, and since there was nothing to do to fix the gratuitous situation, I figured I might as well finish ’em off with a nice pair of shoes and stuff. But then they didn’t wake up, so after clothing ’em I stuffed some fat medical mushrooms into their mouths. See? I’m not the bad guy here? I made them clothes and gave them medicine, I have done nothing creepy or freaky except when I did, like, when I looked at their suspended bodies. Ya vibe?”

“Guilty!” the girls shouted. “Why have you left them chained up like that?!”

Uh, well if I put them down, then their brand-new dresses would get dirty and they’d get mad at me? And if I took off their clothes to avoid the wrinkles, then the *other* girls would get mad at me? No matter what, I’d be beset by false accusations! Pretty unfair, huh?

DAY 76

NOON

The pimpin' guy behind the pimpin' king was actually a normie.

DIORELLE CAPITAL

ROYAL PALACE

FROM THE TOP FLOOR of the royal castle, behind several layers of impenetrable defenses, I came across a boy in a black cloak sitting in the window eating lunch from a box. *Hrmf, the food looks good.*

"Theeeere you are," he said. "Okay, so after tomorrow anytime is good, but I'm done with the clothes! Everyone's got perfect defenses now, so we could definitely try to take on the palace, but do you really have to invite us one by one? I mean, I was kind of a regular back in the day, ya know? Back in my stocking days. I could def escort everyone around the lower warehouses and the hidden passages at the very least, which means we could head over whenever we wanted? Anywho, that's what I came to tell you!"

That was his message. There was no doubt: he had entered a noble's quarters in the royal castle, defended by the Ultimate Lock and right under the nose of the Imperial Guard. Now, he was eating lunch. I supposed it was faster for him to come himself than to send a messenger. He could easily conquer the royal capital and the castle on his own. He could kill Prince Kuzaliusvelli whenever he pleased and destroy the castle at any moment.

The boy spoke lazily, as if bored. He'd acted the same even before the King of the Frontier, Meropapa sim Omui. These were distinctive quirks of the foreign warrior with jet-black hair called "Haruka." I was in his debt; he was the savior of the kingdom. He was the miracle-worker behind the rise of the frontier.

"Apologies for the delay," said Meropapa. "The nobles and servants have gathered, so tomorrow should be just about right. Let me just ask the king. Hm? Okay, it's fine. Tomorrow night it is. I'll send an envoy to greet

you, so don't sneak in, if you please. Well, you may if you insist, but since you are invited guests, I'd like you to arrive formally. Perhaps do not invade the castle. Oh, Haruka-kun! There aren't any massage chairs here, so can you please set up at least one? My back always hurts after a long journey, and there's nothing worse than back pain."

I'd come to speak with Meropapa one-on-one and the boy was already there. The mightiest guardian in all the land, the wondrous Magic Swordsman Lord Vizmuregzero, sat and laughed from the side. How improper! I had seen this sort of cheek few times in my life—the boy really was ignoring me! The king himself!

Defeater of dungeons, champion of the frontier, master of mushrooms, manager of the monster forest, monster on the battlefield, monster slaughterer, owner of the souvenir shops, savior of the slum quarter, liberator of the capital, wielder of death scythes, teleporting nightmare. Every person gave the boy a different epithet. The war god Meropapa sim Omui called him the benefactor of the frontier. The royal-born Lady-Knight Murimour called him the destroyer of tragedies, Lady Merielle called him the boy who rejects the impossible.

That boy defeated the nine Dungeon Deluges that would've destroyed both Diorelle and Omui alike and bested a noble army of forty to fifty thousand men.

"I suppose this is our first time meeting, Haruka," I said. "Thank you for saving me. My name is Dialleces du Diorelle, and I am king of this realm. I am but a figurehead, however. A king only in name. Thank you once more for everything you have done for both this kingdom and the frontier. Thanks hardly suffice—I heard you rescued my daughter—and my sons caused you grief. Allow me to thank you on behalf of my whole family, and to apologize for the endless upsets my foolish sons have troubled you with."

It was a good thing this meeting was in private. Many would be offended that the king would bow his head to someone. A *true* fool was a man who refused to bow his head to the worthy. Of course he was worthy—no thanks would be enough for this boy. Few knew of his deeds, of how many dungeons he defeated. Many in this city didn't even know what he

did for the slum quarter. But every rumor about this boy was right and true…so it was only natural for me to bow my head to him.

Tears came to Meropapa's eyes as he spoke. His wife Murimour looked up to the boy. The princess of the realm, Merielle, turned to him in times of need. They overflowed with gratitude for him. The kingdom killed the frontier, strangled by want and tragedy, by turning its back on it in its time of crisis. The Omui family had shouldered the burden of that tragedy alone, protecting the frontier with all their might. They'd been through so much suffering.

The boy had transformed that site of misery into a happy place. A place where people smiled. Something so simple, yet so impossible. I recognized the same miracle here in the slum quarter. They'd started to smile.

It should've been impossible, unachievable, pointless, futile. No one had even thought of a viable plan to solve these issues—they had been abandoned to a hopeless, tragic destiny. I heard that one of the black-haired lady warriors called the boy the "tragedy murderer," and another young lady dubbed him the "impossibility smasher." Another used the moniker "mortal enemy of common sense."

Indeed—the misfortune of the frontier was destroyed. Indestructible despair was destroyed. Common sense, overcome. That was why Meropapa-san called him the "benefactor of the Omui line"—he made their impossible dream come true. And this boy was…?

"He's not pimpin'! Hang on, is he a fake? If the pimpin' king ain't pimpin', that means get rid of the pimpin', and…who is this guy?!"

"He's the *king*," Meropapa said, "so please address him that way. I suppose we had better put up some instructional posters to clarify."

Posters? This boy…this brat… He was so impudent that normally he'd be put to death on the spot! *What cruel treatment!*

"Look, I just thought he was about to bring in a bunch of babes and start partying and stuff, ya know? Like a pimp?"

"Partying?" Meropapa said. "I can host a party at once if necessary. Ahem! 'Let us get the party started in here!' There is a real party, you know. Tomorrow. You *are* invited. Listen, it hardly matters, I don't need you to

worry about it. Just…please just remember my name? Why do you only remember the Meri part? Then there's *ro*. Mero, Meropapa. That's my name! Not Meridad! It's close, but it's wrong?"

The duke even humored the boy! *"Let us get the party started…"* Must be a greeting from a distant land. I didn't much like the sound of it. Did I really have to say it in that strange tone?

"Ah. If I do recall, Shalliceres went over to the souvenir shop. Please, don't concern yourself with her. She's a stubborn tomboy who only cares about fighting. I've seen a whole new side of her lately. She must've learned that in the frontier. All of my children are causing you so much trouble, aren't they? Well, besides her younger brother, that is. I sometimes worry if she'll turn out all right, so serious and blunt and bull-headed. At least she's determined and works hard. Yes, I suppose that's it."

"Shally? Oh, Shillyshally-san? For sure, I saw Princess Girl earlier! She was suspended by a bunch of chains and changing clothes with Merimeri-san and swallowing big mushrooms. What's up? She was still out cold when I left?"

What on earth was my daughter up to? I understood the changing clothes part, but why was she suspended by chains and swallowing mushrooms?

"How many people can I bring tomorrow?" he asked. "Though I guess I'll just barge in either way, so who cares? But the hidden passageways are cramped, so it could cause a serious traffic jam. An accidental grind-fest of wonderful, HP-draining, squishy-fleshy, soft, pressurized traffic-zone scandal? Ya know?"

"Bring as many people as you like. Everyone is invited. They can eat as much as they like and go as wild as they please. Don't worry about anything breaking either, we'll figure it out."

So *this* was how the dungeon destroyer talked in person. I, the king, was "that," and "the other thing"… Well, who knew. Things would work out in the end. I owed him a debt. More than a few debts, to be honest. I would be bowing my head to this boy and this man for the rest of my days.

Now we were bantering and bickering. It occurred to me in this moment: I ought to have been dead by now. It was a miracle that the worst I

suffered was mockery and disparagement. Everything was my responsibility; I was the king. Those two took on my burden and fought my war. I was a king only in name—a decorative monarch. *I must renew my devotion to the tasks of my position. I must give my all and take back my responsibilities in earnest.*

I did not deserve to be a part of this tale of heroes. A decoration, a figurehead for the sake of a story—that was enough for me. My friend the duke's exhausted face shone with an honest smile. His happiness was more than enough for me.

I made that boy carry the burden of the throne and fight against annihilation all alone. In spite of it all, he made my people smile. That made him the savior of the kingdom, and of me. He was the savior of the Omui line, the once and future saviors of generations of Diorelles. The pair of them deserved to have that title bestowed upon them—Savior of Diorelle.

Now…just what was that about something in my daughter's mouth?

DAY 76

EVENING

It's my sexy-babe-guaranteed championship profitable dress strategy.

SOUVENIR SHOP

ORPHANAGE BRANCH

STALKER GIRL was still receiving her treatment, leaving a gap in the all-important watch over the frontier. So says the poor, overworked teenage delivery boy as he also runs around a souvenir shop. I was busy as a bee!

"The king's dungeon raid invite is tomorrow, for god's sake! Hurry up and choose your dress designs! No time for wardrobe changes either—one dress is plenty! Some of you have submitted *three* orders! Every time I look, the stack of orders is piled higher! Why am I seeing a 'post-ball party dress' order? There's no afterparty! The ball *is* the party! And this 'evening dress'? The event *is* in the evening, so the ball dress *is* your evening dress! If you're gonna try to nab an extra, at least make it an 'afternoon dress.' At least then it'd make sense!"

"Aw, he wants us to stick to two each."

No, *not* two each! Just how many did they want to bring with them? I supposed they hadn't had a chance to dress up much in this world. Any evening invitation from the nobles would inevitably turn irritating to me. Now 90 percent of my workload was manufacturing new massage chairs!

"Okay, fine. We'll have one dress for now, and get the other two later?"

"Yeah, we won't be able to decide in time for tomorrow. I'm down to have the other two dresses later."

"Ah, such a hard decision! I guess I'll have to settle for two for now, and two for later."

"Good idea!"

“No! Bad idea! That’s *more* dresses than before. I told you *one*, how does that become two, much less three? Now you’re saying four, like it makes all the sense in the world! Why are you ignoring me like I’m some drywall? The kind of thing you pry off the wall to whack me with? Alas, alas, I have no friends!”

Exactly how my suggestion to stick to one dress turned into demands for four was one of the seven great mysteries of the world. Trying to solve it would probably double the number of dresses I needed to make, so I had to drop it. This trend pointed towards an exponential rise in dresses—an upward trend so viciously steep that I was starting to get worried about altitude sickness!

By contrast, teenage boys didn’t ask for much. In fact, the less dressed-up the better. *I have to agree there?* Tuxedos and neckties were so annoying. *Don’t think you brats are getting away without dressing up! Do you want to die, Ota-nerd?!* I’d be happy to throw the meatheads into that pile of bodies. I’d do it at a discount!

“Haruka-kun, we decided.”

“Please make this design!”

“We can handle the garter belt and underwear. I can handle it!”

“And please enhance the defenses if you can. I want to still be able to protect everyone in this dress!”

Shield Rep presented her design to me: a long, draped dress with a swelling skirt. The dress had a lot of volume, but if you took a look at the backside, you’d see that it was a sleeveless halter-neck dress with an exposed back… *This’ll only protect your legs!* I suppose I could still apply magic defense, especially if they wore the bikini armor, but for some reason, the girls didn’t want to show up to the ball in only that. *It’s so trendy nowadays though?* The real-life inspirations behind the bikini-warrior babes didn’t like bikinis, for whatever reason!

They also submitted orders for belly dancing outfits along with their dresses… Doing everything at once should minimize the damage. I really didn’t understand why, after forcing me to embarrass myself making their equipment, *they* were criticizing *me*. Their faces were flushed too! Why didn’t they understand that it wasn’t me? It was Magic Hands! Me, I was

disagreeable, no doubt about it, but my Magic Hands were friendly little feelers!

"Haruka-san, are you sure you can make one for me as well? My silly brother is causing you so much trouble and all… You provided priceless mushrooms for my recovery, and have given me such a wonderful life on top of everything else… Now, a dress?"

What was her name? Liar-liar-san? She'd decided on a dress of her own. She'd really had a hard time deciding, but now she was putting on an award-winning dress-decision performance aided by her innocent cuteness combined with her lovely elf face and banger boobs.

"Nah, this is just my payment for all your work. Those mushrooms are low-key everywhere."

It was hard to tell because her skin was so pale, but her face, previously parched and gaunt from her illness, was looking a bit more hale. She was getting healthier with the restoration-mushrooms and meat as a part of the daily menus. A dress would certainly suit her sumptuous elven figure. Besides, she looked after the orphans when I was away, so a dress was just a part of her salary. I was rich from selling mushrooms to her cherry-stem-twisting meathead brother! Wow. The fact that an old dude was valuable was a sign of the apocalypse. The end of this world!

The girls had finally gathered, and so the room was squirming with teenage-girl bodies strapped down with chains. I had my blindfold on, but this room sure did *feel* crowded! With twenty-one people already in here, why did four Mean Girls have to push their way in? I didn't want to say anything in case they bit me.

"All right, I know it's a bit tight in here, but I'm going to get it all over with at once! I'm not sure why there's a naked girl festival going on, but I'll certainly sell some tickets. I'll have to go for front-row seats too. We can set up a ticket-resale booth and make stacks from the old dudes who inevitably come flocking. Now *those* are sights I wanna see!"

"You won't be seeing anything! Or selling any tickets! And this isn't a festival!!!"

Looked like we wouldn't be selling tix to old dudes, sadly. I supposed I didn't want the old-dude ratio to increase in here, but if it was for the

purpose of a shy naked girl festival, then I'd steel myself for the worst and seal my fate. I'd actually rather seal the nerds so I could burn their heads off, but I guess they'd already gotten haircuts, so it wasn't necessary. What a shame.

"Okay, I'm gonna start… Aren't you guys a little close together? It's cramped in here. Making clothes in this packed room… All I can envision is crowded-train creep levels of morbid tentacles. Are you guys sure about this? None of y'all are gropers, right?"

"We're not gropers! Hurry up and get it over with!"

The room was sardine-packed with naked-girl bodies—plus one elf body. A bit of a prickly situation for a teenage boy. They wanted it, though! Measuring them one at a time would probably make them too anxious to volunteer after hearing each other squeal and faint, one by one. Doing it all at once would at least disguise whose screams were whose. Wisdom could probably distinguish the simultaneous screaming voices of a hundred people at once with Parallel Thinking, but I decided to keep that my own personal secret. They were packed in so damn close to me that I was low-key scared.

Even though I was blindfolded, I got enough of a sense from my surroundings that I inevitably visualized them. The panorama of twenty-one sardine-packed teenage girls and one elf fully, gloriously, splendidly nude, and me just sitting in the middle of them… *What is my purpose in life, anyway?!*

I hoped the answer to that question wasn't "making underwear." All we'd been through would be a little bit much if all I were here for was to make underwear. Marie Antoinette would never forgive me! Oh my god, was this going to be an "if you're surrounded by female bodies, why don't you just get one yourself" situation? Would this world-swap story get turned into a sex-swap story?!

"I'm going to do this all at once, so try to open up some space. Stay standing as long as you can! Judging from what I've seen from past experiences—which is barely anything, because I'm not looking—you should try your best even though I think you'll fail. We've got the chains rigged up but I get an itty-bitty inkling you'll get mad at me about that! So try your best? Just ease up on the lecture that comes after, please?

Anyhow… Magic Entanglement. Magic Hands. Lasciv—wait, I don't need to use that? They'll get mad at me! Using it would result in a great view of a 360-degree tragedy?"

Oh god, this is rough! My nerves—they were melting! Detailed data on twenty-one bodies flooding my consciousness, 3D full-color VR with stimulated sense of touch too. Opening my eyes as well would make things a little *too* real! The simulation felt real enough! Plus, the girls were so close that I could actually sense their body heat and scents! Uh oh. Eggplant emoji.

"Eeeeeeeeeeek! Aagggggghh! Ahhhhhhhhh! Urgh…" *Plunk*.

"Hang 'em up? Keep 'em in the same order."

See, I wasn't the bad guy here! There were just too many of them, so when a few of the girls couldn't stand it, they collided with each other and started knocking more girls over like dominos. Their most dangerous parts sent dangerous stimulation into Magic Hands. It was a chain reaction of girls and Magic Hands tangling and tumbling, bringing the full force of Sex God and Lascivious down onto their lovely bodies. The ensuing uproar eliminated them in a titillating, tumbling sesh…by which I mean, they passed out.

One day, this shall be known as the tragedy of the teens. I was a teenage boy, buried beneath them all; buried in *squishy-squish* and *twitchety-twitch*. When I started to move, it caused a frantic parade of pleasure up and down my body. *Ugh, I seriously gotta get out of here!* I was undergoing a male metamorphosis into a masochist!

Now that the girls were suspended with chains, I could finish the job. It was a lot easier to make the clothes now, even though they'd probably lecture me later. I was happy that at least most of the designs were sleeveless. Yippie ki-yay?

Eventually, everyone woke up. I didn't need to search the globe for paradise; it was right under my nose the whole time. Yes, I was surrounded by a paradise of freshly dressed, dazzlingly gorgeous teenage girls (featuring a bonus elf) all shooting glare-fire my way! *Uh, Dancer Girl, can*

you release them from the chains already? I didn't get why they were mad at *me*, although I supposed my servants were my responsibility.

I whipped out a large mirror so they could see how they looked. They were instantly enchanted. I needed to get some more mirrors in here or there'd be an outbreak of wrestling matches. *Don't push! You'll break the mirror!*

I made some trial mirrors to rip off the girls with, but I wasn't fully pleased with the results. The glass was smooth and I didn't see any noticeable warping. My Magic Hands had put them together with Wisdom, so I hadn't expected there to be any issues, but the reflections weren't perfect—it must've been the composition of the glass and the metal boards I'd used. I had improved the luster of the glass through trial and error, and the girls said they didn't mind imperfections.

Anything made with Wisdom handling the Holding magic should've ended up perfect. The problem had to have been the metal base. I had it polished, but there were small gaps in between it and the layer of glass. That must have been causing the distortion. My materials weren't good enough. The typical mirror-plating process is a surface treatment that coats the glass with a thin metal imitation. I should've been able to copy it with magic, but the result ended up being a little see-through. That meant that the glass wouldn't last for long either. I didn't know the production process—or more like I knew I had to spray the coating on, but I hadn't perfected how. It did reflect, so I supposed that was fine. The girls were happy, at least.

"Woooow! You all look like princesses!"

The girls wore their dresses to the dinner table to a chorus of excitement from the orphans. Even little kids liked dresses, apparently. I decided I'd make dresses for the little girls too. I was pretty sure the little boys wouldn't like tailcoats, but I couldn't leave them out. I wasn't wild about wearing a tuxedo myself.

DAY 76

NIGHT

I can't help being shy about holding hands with a girl for a dance? Why can't I use my tentacles instead?

SOUVENIR SHOP

ORPHANAGE BRANCH

WE TOOK A BREAK from our workout sessions to practice for the ball. Princess Shalliceres and Merielle-sama taught us the basics. Nefertiri-san mastered everything after watching the moves just once and was now helping to teach the rest of us. The boys all ran away. Haruka-kun was the only one who tried for a few minutes before immediately dashing for the bath.

On the orders of Nefertiri-san, who said that we ought to learn both the men's and women's parts, we were now locked in an intense ballroom-dancing lesson. Learning the men's part did make remembering the women's a lot easier. When a freshly bathed Haruka-kun spotted Vice Rep A doing the men's part for me, his quip of "Wow. You would look even better in a waistcoat. I'll make you one if you want?" resulted in him getting chased around by morning stars. *That was an off-limits diss.* Vice Rep A received a constant stream of love letters and fan letters back at school. No "but you don't have—" comments allowed!

"The dresses are so beautiful, aren't they?"

"And he said they have steel wire inside…powered up with mithril!"

"A level 50 sword wouldn't just fail to cut the dress—it wouldn't even leave a scratch."

"I never thought I'd experience a heavenly dress like this in my life."

"Yeah, they're not just fancy dresses. They're decked out in defenses and endowed with effects. This dress is better than my armor!"

We didn't know what the two remaining great houses would do. They were already defeated, but we couldn't let our guard down. Still, was this too much? Our dresses were stronger than our dungeon equipment. The accessories on top of that made them sufficient for war or hand-to-hand combat. On top of *that*, even, they had Storage for keeping our weapons on us, and plenty of other hidden features. Just to look at them, they were gorgeous. They'd eclipsed all of our imaginations in their sheer beauty. But…the gloves had metal stakes poking out. They were convertible gauntlets. The splendid corsages exploded when you threw them. If you unfurled the lace from the frills, they became whips, and the heels of our pumps were switchblades. The dresses themselves had needles built into them, so we could curl up in a defensive position like hedgehogs. We could even shoot the needles! This wasn't practical protection against assassins—this was protection against the strongest assassin the world had ever seen! We could take on entire armies by ourselves with these dresses. They were powerful enough to annihilate anybody!

Yep, the dresses were luxurious, elegant, and powerful. Good enough for dungeons. We were off to the king's *dungeon*, after all!

"They're prismatic too, so it's practically a bargain. I'm in more debt than ever though…"

"So pretty! Ugh, I gotta make more money back in the frontier!"

"And the fabric is imbued with magic, so it can change sizes! Maybe even in the stomach area?"

"What should I get for the second one? After I hit up a dungeon, of course."

We were drowning in debt. We were working a lot, but we were still losing money! We received enormous salaries, but what came in lagged far behind what was going out. Haruka-kun's Wisdom skill brought in so many new, amazing creations that he inevitably ripped us off! The Deluge had a lot of monsters, but they were all low-level so we didn't make much compared to the frontier. We hadn't found any good equipment either. Haruka-kun checked out the remains of the dungeons, but they didn't have any hidden rooms. Buying too many manju was the finishing blow!

"At this rate we'll have to sell ourselves into Servitude? Pray for us!"

“Oh god, debt slaves? I mean…it’s totally possible.”

“We gotta get back to the frontier!”

The frontier was the best way to make money. Now that we were all stronger, we had to fight. Haruka-kun had his house in the forest there, and the Poster Girl was waiting for us back at the inn.

We’d cried a lot there, but we laughed and made merry even more. I missed the frontier so much, even though we’d only been away for two weeks. It wasn’t a place to go to. It was a place to ‘go home’ to. Our whole class ended up buying those I ❤ FRONTIER T-shirts. Just felt right, you know?

Dance, dance, dance, dance. Dance and form a circle, trace a figure eight, turn around and dance, spin and dance and dance. Follow the correct posture to control the center of gravity, line up your legs and move your body into the dance. If you got the footwork down, the rest of your body followed. Riding the rhythm of the music; letting your body fly freely into dance.

The techniques of fighting we’d honed since coming here had become dance moves. Throw in a little grace, and voila—dancing! If I concentrated on the correct steps, all four of my limbs moved correctly to the music. I imitated the image of Nefertiri-san’s flawless movements; I seared them into my brain. If I pictured her, my own body began to open up like flapping wings. *It’s like magic.* Surrendering to the beautiful music, I let the dance magic take hold. It only took a little practice to master the moves.

The other girls were also surprised at how well they could move, and they laughed and smiled as they twirled. It’s funny—we would’ve never experienced anything like this if we hadn’t come here. We enjoyed such beautiful clothes and our strong, athletic bodies. Most of all, we loved the magic that turned the impossible into the real. We were going to a ballroom dance for princesses like every little girl dreams about. Haruka-kun probably thought it was a pain and wanted to skip it, but he shut up and went with the flow for our sake.

He was worried about the potential risks while still figuring out how to make the luxurious ballroom gowns of little girls’ dreams. He asked us

our opinions, went through trial and error, again and again…and in the end, he came up with spectacular gowns. Haruka-kun was our personal magician. Somehow, he even created a spellstone device that could record sound, allowing us to listen to the songs outside of practice. His magic made everything possible. He was a scheming warlock with the kindness of a monk.

"In dance, figure, important. What you show, feeling."

"Got it!"

A magician out of a fairy tale cast a Cinderella spell. He conjured everything, including a magnificent horse-drawn carriage to take us to the ball. That magician? The same one who made us all this happy, who made all of our dreams come true. He was going to be our hero again tomorrow. We practiced dancing with everything we had. We needed to be perfect.

None of us needed a prince. All we needed was the magician who had cast this spell over our lives. With him, any prince would be unnecessary. We were all dancing for the magician, not the prince.

He made us all so happy. He wove our happiness out of thin air. He never got any of the credit, deflected praise from everyone. We would insist he got everything he deserved. This was all for the magician. Tomorrow, we'd dance for the magician that we were thankful for, whom we respected, whom we believed in. Give the tall, handsome, wealthy prince to some Cinderella far away. We were happy with our nasty, twisted, liar magician.

Get those glittering, glamorous gorgeous princes out of here. Our prince used money for happiness and peace, gave away every cent he had to ruin himself and bring happiness to the world. Our prince donated everything he had for someone else's sake, flung cash at the world to turn poverty into excess. Our prince made beautiful equipment, gorgeous clothes, anything and everything for the sake of others. He remained in simple black clothes. For him to sit out of the happiness—no, it wouldn't do!

No one needed to know about him. No one needed to praise him. He didn't want those things, not even deep down. Still, he was the prince whom we thanked. The ball tomorrow was for him.

The fairytale prince who made us endlessly happy was shabby, dirty, and sneering. Our prince had been destroyed and beaten to a ravaged corpse, a pile of shattered human garbage ready to be tossed away. *I'll never accept that end of the story, never!* I swore it upon my heart, then and there. We vowed not to stumble, not to slip.

In days long past, dance was a way to express gratitude and joy to the gods. We didn't dance for a god or a king. Tomorrow we would dance to express our joy, our gratitude, and the daily happiness that filled our lives. He wouldn't let us thank him with words. He ran away the moment someone tried to start a serious conversation. We had to dance. We'd tell him we were thankful. *We're happy now.*

DAY 76

NIGHT

Not sure how I feel about post-puberty excessive nutrition-based rapid growth.

SOUVENIR SHOP

ORPHANAGE BRANCH

U*GH THIS SUCKS. This slurps. I want noodles.* Yeah, not gonna lie, I hadn't figured out how to make ramen yet, and curry was just as far away. Anyway: this sucked!

I got the sense that Marie Antoinette was gonna show up at the ball and rev up the guillotine, although if that were to really happen I'd kinda dig it. This sucked. Now that Merimeri-san and Princess Girl said they were staying here too, there was really no escape. The girls were ridiculously excited for the dance, practicing like they were straight up possessed.

I'd feel bad for them if I called it off, so I just had to go along with it. It'd been battle after battle for us in this world, fighting monsters first, then all-out war. After all that, everyone deserved a bit of a change of pace. The girls were so excited about it, so while it definitely sucked, I had to suck it up. Still, wasn't it just plain embarrassing to hold hands and dance with girls? Why couldn't I use my tentacles?

I wasn't letting the nerdbrains leave me stranded here. I locked them up in the dungeon just to ensure they wouldn't sneak away. Those cowards tried to escape! And without me! I suspected they would and sent the demon scythes after them, and thank goodness I did.

Still, I didn't plan on dancing. If I didn't the girls would get mad at me, though, so I learned the moves. All I had to do was record the moves with Jupiter Eye and Wisdom, then use Blockhead and Body Manipulation to make my body do them. Easy. It didn't even require any magic or special body manipulation—it was just an ordinary ballroom dance.

"Ugh, a white bowtie, as in a white blowfly, as in I'd like to fly out of here, as in…bye? No, I don't want to be a fly, but a bowtie kinda just makes me sigh. I'd like to sigh goodbye. This whole thing sucks! Who came up with this? I mean, what's the fun part? Well, being close to girls is the fun part, but if that was the objective, I'd rather skip the dance and go straight to the wrestling sesh for some mega-pressurized hyper closeness all over me. I guess you gotta get what you can get?"

Jiggle jiggle.

It was a *social*, so socializing was likely involved. I didn't want to get to know any of the nobles or royals anyway! The dance supposedly served as an opportunity for young men and women to meet, but I wasn't a noble. It didn't have anything to do with me! Why'd the pimpin' king even invite me? He probably just wanted to throw a rager! That damn pimpin' king!

Dancer Girl was an even more masterful dancer than I could've imagined. Miss Armor Rep was incredible herself. Their dancing impact hit me like a Formula One truck. Their serenity seemed to pause time itself as they danced. It was a dance beautiful enough to steal the heart of whoever looked on. Needless to say, they were also skilled in battle…the furious raging battles of the evening hours. I lost everything I had to them last night. I got finished off with a chokehold and a moan! A double-team attack!

Slimey memorized all the dance moves after one try.

"I get the waltz, but was the tango necessary? And that final breakdance was definitely over the top. Poster Girl is the only person in this fantasy world who knows how to breakdance."

Poster Girl's windmill was a work of art, but Slimey's transition from a flare into a swipe was just as nasty. *I'd rather go to an inn dance battle than a palace ball, not gonna lie!*

"I wonder what everyone's going to do after tomorrow," I sighed. "Tomorrow's gonna be mainly waltzes, so why learn the slow foxtrot? Why the penny waltz? Are they trying to dominate the art of the dance or something? Seriously, the tango?"

The ball tomorrow was almost certainly going to be all waltzes. When the girls spun, their long skirts would swirl and swirl. It was the most

standard and popular of the ballroom dances in fantasy stories.

"Although the penny waltz is just the same moves at triple speed. In movies it always looked the same but at a faster beat? And the slow foxtrot was gentle, moving in a stylish, jazzy rhythm. The quickstep dancing seemed fun, with the precise moves flying and spinning and leaping and dashing all over the dance floor… I mean, what exactly are they going for? I really doubt there'll be any song up-tempo enough for all that?"

Jiggle jiggle.

And the tango… I mean, it was a standard dance, but how did tango figure into anything in this world? Did Argentina come and plop itself into this European universe?

The twenty-five girls were practicing together in the hall. I doubted any of the noble guys could keep up with them.

In terms of pure stats, keeping up with a level 200+ partner wouldn't be easy. *You'd probably lose your arm trying!*

They were going to learn five more Latin dances next. Just to be clear, I didn't have to learn those? That wasn't a question, that was a statement. In fact, I think those would be better off for the otaku. Teach Ota-san the Ota-samba. *I'd love to see that!*

All this super-high-difficulty-ultra-precise dancing that mixed fantasy world stats and modern world technique… *Won't we be alienating the locals?* None of the people in this world could keep up. And the nerds weren't excited themselves, honestly. They were definitely trying to run away. Better get Vice Rep A in that tuxedo, pronto.

I finished the clothes for the orphans. They'd grow out of them soon, so I made paper patterns to give them a little room to grow into. They could try them on and wear them after a bit of fine-tuning. They'd suffered from nutrition deficits for a long time, so they were growing quickly. This was the right solution, I assumed.

Meanwhile, those in my class experiencing excessive nutrition-caused rapid growth had finished burning off today's dinner with dance practice. A bit of Presence Sensing unveiled a twirling, tittering scene. Now that the paper patterns were done, I went back to my room to make dresses for Poster Girl and Stalker Girl. Did the common people here have folk

dance mixers? Ooh, folksy dresses would sell for sure. I wanted to try making some.

Along with the newfound speed and precision I was completing things for my side job, the profits of the souvenir shop were growing. We were actually *exporting* products to the frontier shop at this rate, but the frontier branch also had incredible sales. They even paid me with a kingdom-issued 100 million ele bill. What was I supposed to do with that much cash? I didn't think I could buy 100 million ele worth of stuff anywhere around here.

With such high profits, I could start making large-scale investments. The wealth of the frontier was starting to circulate throughout the economy. Ordinary people weren't poor anymore, but there was still a long way to go. At this point the wealth wasn't enough to make up for the interest on their loans. *Not at my interest rates!*

So what's gonna happen tomorrow? Hopefully nothing, and the king would regain his authority. If the other nobles tried to pull something though…it would be tomorrow. I would be the target.

They couldn't lay their hands on the king anymore. Not any time soon. And so, I'd be targeted. I really didn't want to get the girls potentially pulled into anything, but they insisted that I come to the ball anyway.

To restrain the effects of my skills, I decided to skip upgrading my equipment with mithril. Any upgrades there would also affect Magic Entanglement, and I was always on the verge of being ripped apart as it was. Still, I couldn't let anything go wrong tomorrow. Most likely, I'd only have my staff on me. The Universe Staff could shift its size and shape, so I could make it a cane or a bracelet to conceal it.

I decided to keep the mithril power-ups to only the "Void Staff: Super effective for wielders of Void magic," "Elder Ent Staff: Increases magic power and magic control. MP +50%. Attribute-boost (large)," "Severing Staff: +30% to all stats. Magic Skill Control. Severing. Seal. MP boost." I could use the Void Staff for finding enemies, the Elder Ent Staff to increase my magic control, and then the Severing Staff to boost my Detection with magic control and have Sever on hand for emergencies. Even with such extreme boosts to my Detection skill, Wisdom should be able to control it. I

was pretty sure I had raised Wisdom's basic control enough to handle increased magic outputs sufficiently.

"The skills destroying my body will be inevitable, but I'll just get better at Revival. No big. That means the inevitable entangling that results from getting better at Sex God… Yeah, someone's gonna call the cops on me."

The "Void Staff: Super effective for wielders of Void magic," "Elder Ent Staff: Increases magic power and magic control. MP +50%. Attribute-boost (large)," and "Severing Staff: +30% to all stats. Magic Skill Control. Severing. Seal. MP boost" combined to become the "Sacred Severing Staff: +50% to all stats. Severing. Seal. Magic control boost (ultra), MP boost (ultra)." It seemed rather robustly ridiculous in my rote estimation.

"Dimensional Void magic… I can't even imagine activating that with Dimension Blade! It was already hard enough to control. Now even the control is gonna be uncontrollable!"

Still, my control was up across the board, so now that I had a massive MP boost I needed to practice handling… Oh yeah! First I should deal with the stripped and unconscious problem before me. This was a bit dangerous.

"I guess they all merge into the Universe Staff in the end… Oh, is the Septuple Sword one of the seven in there? When I split them up, I can see the Mistletoe Sprig is still in there, plus the original Tree Branch. That meant there were more than twenty-one items combined! Hang on, just how many things can fit in here? Are my items gluttonous beasts?!"

Magic Entanglement would kill me with all of that. I would explode beyond the point of Revival. If you could gather together my strewn body parts and shove them together, you'd end up with not Revival but Rebirth of a new human altogether. *I'd rather not try that out.* Still, Sever should be able to decipher this. I should be able to foresee all of the dangers and difficulties. So long as I stuck to surprise attacks, I'd stay safe, and if the enemy found me first, I could always escape with Teleport.

"To be brought into this world and murdered and destroyed… What a horrendous deed of disastrous dimensions it would be. I've decided not to die."

I tried sending some magic into the new version of the Universe Staff. It pulsed. *Oh god, what…* It sucked up my MP?! H-hang on, the devils were on their way back! I'd have to resist the succubae without MP?!

"I don't have enough time! I'm crazy hungry too! I'm crazy hurried! I'll just quickly gobble up this 'MP restoration mushroom secret soy sauce red vinegar stir-fry!' It certainly doesn't look pretty, but I've got no time! Ack!"

"We're…back…" (Grinning.)

"We're, finished, dancing." (Smirking.)

Perhaps they'd perceived my MP deficit. Yup, they took me by the arms and dragged me straight into bed?

"P-please be gentle?" *It doesn't hurt to try, right?*

Shake shake.

Pout pout.

Uh, they were shaking their heads with all their might. *Guess that makes sense?* Getting pinned on both sides by beauties who had mastered the art and science of sex—neither of whom I was capable of overpowering with my stats—meant I was in for a deadly devastating delight. My staff would be gloriously gobbling up my staff. *If I only had my tentacles…* Then I'd take care of the rest, I mean brr-br-br-br-breeeast?! No. It was all over. (The Sex God was sunk.)

Looked like I couldn't get the skill Unsinkable, but at least I could get Limit Breaker. Or, at least, they broke my limits. *Oh god! It was meant for battle all along! On this battlefield! Gurgle gurgle, glub glub. Gwaaaaaaagh!* (Sex God sank again.)

DAY 77

MORNING

They say that the early bird gets the worm, but I say the bird's secret skill is what matters most.

SOUVENIR SHOP

ORPHANAGE BRANCH

A MORE MAGNIFICENT MORNING was never mourned. As they say, the early bird gets two women. Good sex comes to those who wait, you know the deal. I'd finally had my revenge.

A melodious morning flushed the cheeks of two gorgeous ladies, faces dripping with drool out of wide-open mouths and tears out of wide-open eyes… The only complication was that those eyes looked a little dead. *They're completely vacant?*

Well, they looked broken, but at least they were smiling. Their red tongues lolled out of their wide-open mouths. They were twitching and murmuring nonsense, with sweat glistening on their glamorous, twitching bodies. They squirmed on the bed. *Look, what they did to me last night was way crazier, I'll have you know.*

Still, in the end I'd had my revenge. I'd won!

"What a magnificent, miraculous morning! Except for these dead pupils! Those cross-eyed eyeballs? Those gazes looking straight to heaven! Leaving that aside, it's time for a miraculously healthy breakfast for a happy awakening! First we're gonna need some mushrooms, so eat up?" *Kaprmff, gabbfffth!*

I was sure that they would unleash some terrifying payback on me later, but for now, victory was mine. I wouldn't be able to escape with my dignity forever, but the battle never ends for a teenage boy. '*Tis a cruel world.*

It was fine weather with a 100 percent chance of explosive glare-showers raining down on me all morning. I guess the screaming bothered my classmates? The impropriety of those young ladies was shocking the neighbors.

"So. A good night and morning, huh?"

The power-ups to the Universe Staff were pretty impressive. I had transformed it into a ring so I could keep it on my person, and its bonuses had been enough to topple two Dungeon Emperor-class warriors. My improved tentacle control, plus the effects of Lascivious and Sex God defied reason when combined with Magic Entanglement.

Psst… Whisper, whisper… "Are those two…okay?"

"I thought they might die. And they're immortal!"

"Sensual Sex God. A lascivious demon king has risen straight up from hell…with improved control, too!"

"You serious?"

"The Sex God has gotten even more powerful?!"

Uh, why were the girls falling over unconscious first thing in the morning? They were super excited for the ball today, that had to be it. They were practicing all evening yesterday. Was that why they looked so red?

"Good morning!" the orphans chimed.

"Morning, everyone!"

The orphans washed their faces and joined us in the dining room, waiting for breakfast. *Time to show off my new side-job prowess!*

I used Holding on the room and steamed and simmered up some rice for rice balls in an instant. I lined them up across the table. The rice ball spread was soon joined by some steaming creamed corn soup. Freshly fried bacon and eggs soared across the room to their places on plates, while my Magic Hands sliced cabbage for a mushroom salad over everyone's heads. *I'm faster than ever!*

"Th-this speed!"

"He's making the food even faster!"

"Haruka-kun's homemaking powers…they're unmatched!"

“I think his cooking skills have leveled up! A lot!”

“Looks amazing! Let’s dig in!”

For the first time in their lives, the orphans were able to eat full meals. Lately, they had stopped crying over excellent food, which meant they had finally accepted it as normal. Not completely, though? Today they wept over the food, saying, “Is this a dream?” and “I can’t believe it.” The girls said that they even cried tears of joy in the bath.

They grew up helping each other in desolate poverty, balancing on a razor’s edge between life and death. I just wanted them to accept that what they were experiencing now was completely and utterly normal. The orphans didn’t yet understand the true meaning of business, but I had big plans for their education. They needed to take back everything they’d lost, profit all of the joy stolen from them with interest, seize every inch of that happiness by the root and recognize that *they deserved it all.* In that respect, they still had a long way to go.

The souvenir shop was taking the day off because we needed to prepare for the ball today. The clothes had all been properly fitted, so all that was left was to tinker with their properties. I went to the spacious hall downstairs to do some training. A suspiciously joyful Miss Armor Rep and Dancer Girl followed me… *Yeah, they’re gonna bonk me?* They were going to help (get) me train (revenge)!

I took deep breaths and readied my stance, activating Magic Entanglement across my body. For the first time, I could feel the effects precisely, perceive the power of the skill and how to wield it. In other words, alarm bells were going off like crazy! This was too dangerous! I supposed the only way to get better was to keep allowing myself to break down, then build myself back up. *Oops, I broke?*

“Bring it on! By which I mean, go easy on me! Uh, don’t shake your head like that! Just be a bit soft, as in *squishy bouncy busty*, lovely—gwaaaagh!”

It’s war. They were upset about my surprise attack this morning and had their hearts set, settled, and strenuously serious about a beating. They were overflowing with such furious, frenetic fighting spirit that their faces had gone blue. If I wanted to go to the ball, I’d have to survive a battle. *Oh god, Dancer Girl’s just getting started!*

I started to circulate magic through my staff as my body started to creak. I needed this level of power. Without it, I'd be dead before nightfall! I forced my body to obey my mind and moved. I took deep breaths, unifying my consciousness, movements, and breathing.

I stepped forward as I exhaled. The flow of the world grew a skin over it as it froze. The nature of time shifted. The world paled and grew slower and slower.

She's smiling—Miss Armor Rep had a beaming smile on her face. *But her eyes have a violent fury!*

Our bodies swayed, then vanished. We didn't even leave afterimages. I used to see her like a mirage, but I didn't even see that anymore. Using sight took too long—I had to sense her. My senses expanded to what my eyes could perceive now, and the coming future possibilities that they couldn't. I activated Magic Eye, God's Eye, Clairvoyant, Wisdom Eye, and Transfer all at once, unifying them. I smiled.

I manipulated my body precisely, as if I were swimming through dense water, stringing together exact, precise motions. I needed to surpass speed, sight, sound, and senses. Everything. I revved up my acceleration to full throttle. I removed the cap on my skills, letting them break their limits, jumble together and collapse my body as it revived itself. We all burst forward, kept together by a thread of magic control. They whipped around me like a violent merry-go-round, all of my skills jumbling together and merging.

Slice, slash, stab, unified into a single smooth motion. She drew an arc with my blade, spun in a circle, tracing a perfect sphere via dance. Now I understood why Miss Armor Rep's waltz had been so perfect. She'd done the same thing as she did now, just without her sword. A clean spin for a blow—*bonk*.

Her sword swirled, showered sparks, and gracefully plunged in a perfect plume. Her lightning-quick attack faded into a slow-motion dance, combining smooth strikes as if she were moving through clear water.

This dance of death continued. Demise swayed at the end of her blade. I kinda needed to go with the flow or else I'd get bonked, ya know? Clairvoyant fed me an endless stream of *bonk*ing visions. Possible outcomes whirled like a dazzling kaleidoscope, expanding in limitless

colors, shapes, and sizes of bonking…every single possible outcome was a bonking?! *Ka-bonk!*

"Urrrrrk!"

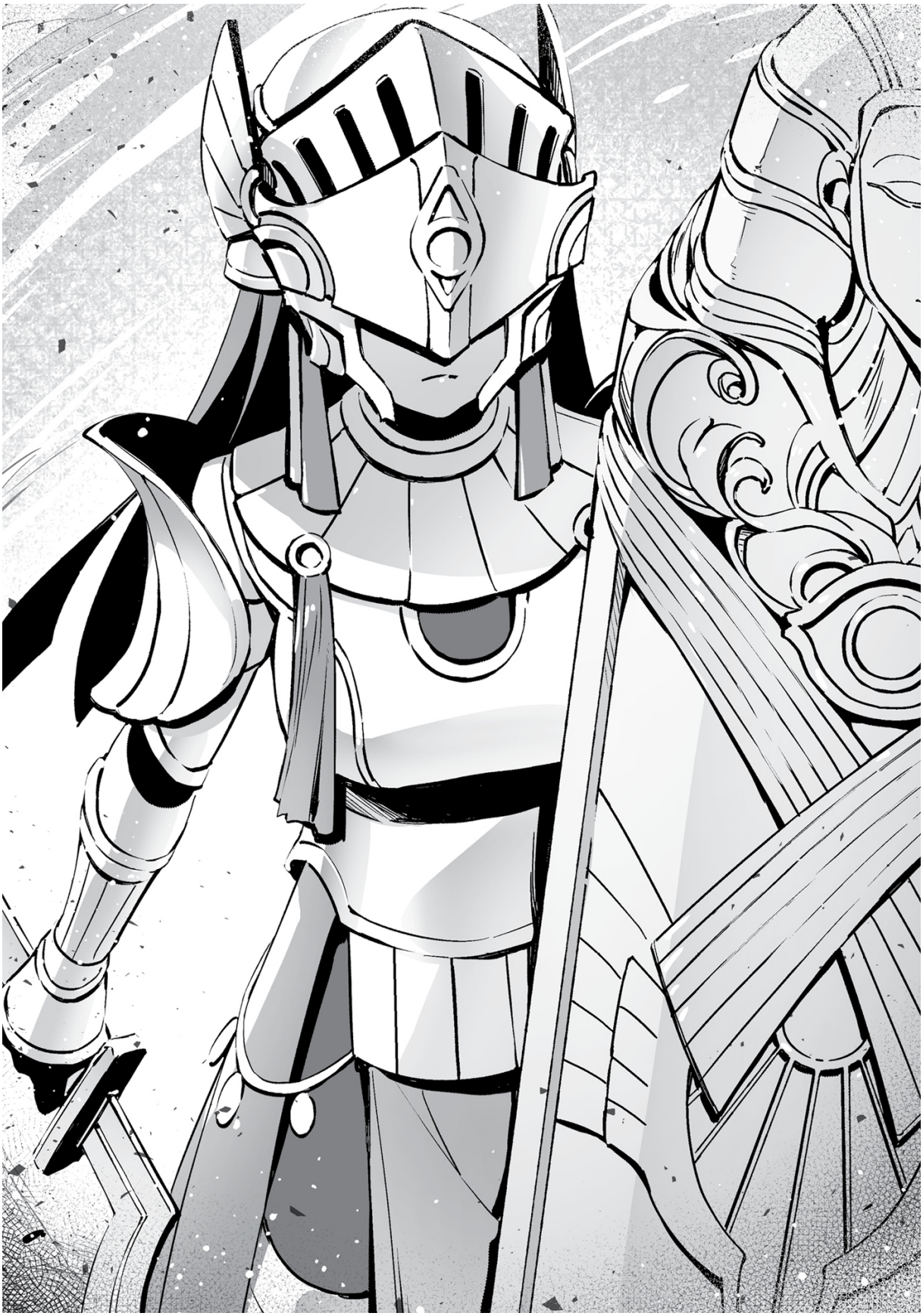
Jiggle jiggle.

I lost all track of time. It felt like the single bonk lasted for all eternity, while at the same time lasting only for a fraction of an instant. *Ugggh, I'll have my revenge tonight!*

"Now, I, fight."

Dancer Girl was still level 5. If she got hit by my attack, her life would be at risk, so she activated her Mythological Coffin…making her a heavy-armored infantry knight? For some reason she seemed upset about it, so she went over to Miss Armor Rep and examined her Platinum Armor while making a few tweaks…and now her figure was showing straight through the armor? Her armor stretched to skintight levels; I could see every curve of her figure. *Damn, she's so hot!*

"I'm, ready. Come!"



She hid her body behind a large shield as she attacked with her sword from left, right, above, and below. It was a distinctive pattern—her curved scimitar traced the rounded outline of the shield, flashing out like a talon to snatch away my own weapons. *That's a nasty sword right there!* She had an infinite variety of high-speed footwork patterns, leading to a dizzying array of attacks. Her high-speed, irregular movements made her a surprisingly effective and evasive guardian.

She rotated the greatshield. Well, I wasn't sure if it was the shield that was spinning or Dancer Girl who was flipping around it. In the midst of some sort of rotation, her scimitar came rocketing right at me from a completely unexpected angle. Two more attacks in quick succession, another sword, and then her chains. She had kept them hidden behind her shield and with her irregular, rapid-fire movements, unleashed a strike like a fully armored, thousand-armed Kannon. There was no way to interrupt the attack. I had to use Airwalk to drift out of range, but her shield caught up with me, cornering me. With her shield so close I could barely see around me, forcing me to rely on images from Clairvoyant. Her dancing disguised the true intentions of her movements, and the shield kept her body hidden.

Well, I guess it's about time.

"Okay, I'm coming, and no complaints, 'kay? 'Cause this skill is as nonsensical as it is invincible, I mean, it's Random Fire?"

I instantly closed the gap between us and slashed straight forward with my staff. Time froze—Dancer Girl whirled around, swung her shield through the air, and launched dozens of chains towards me. *What a sight…* But using Random Fire while teleporting sent me straight through her attack safely? *Yeah, Random Fire is low key OP?*

"Coward, cheater, traitor, liar!"

Uh, Dancer Girl was upset? I mean, what I did had made zero sense. Still, she managed to defend herself from an instantaneous teleportation attack despite having her level reset all the way down. My speed should've been quadruple hers, and it was the first time I'd used Teleport to attack her.

I guess Random Fire won't work on her after all. It's not enough to defeat a level 5 Dungeon Emperor. She was such a big fat cheater herself

that her Mythological Coffin armor took a Dimension Blade blow without even a scratch?

“It’s lunch time, and after lunch we gotta get changed and go into the city. After doing some wandering around, we’re gonna go raid the castle, right? Still wondering why they invited us to do that. Happy to oblige, though!”

“Let’s go!”

I supposed we’d come back home after the ball. The capital road seemed a bit cramped for thirty-two people at once. Maybe we could just leave the nerd brigade behind?

DAY ?

Not like I could remember so many names at once anyhow, but I'm definitely erasing them from my memory.

KINGDOM OF DIORELLE

DIORELLE KEEP

LORD'S PARLOR

THE NOBLE HOUSES of ancient legends. Two of the four great houses had been crushed, destroying the equilibrium that had existed since Diorelle's founding. The fall of one house meant opportunity for another. At the same time, it would be ill fortune for the king to gain too much power.

If the royals had too much power, they could easily dispense with the rest of the nobility. In all likelihood, the king would attempt to do to us what we did to him. If I were forced to retire, it would be impossible for the twin candidates who might succeed me to overcome this predicament. We had poured funding into their education, trained them in academics and martial arts, everything we could muster we had given to them… But in the end, they were playboys, only interested in messing around with women and up to nothing but mischief and sexual conquests. I'd been left to clean up their numerous messes… I really couldn't understand them.

"The king is untouchable now. Should we target the princess instead?"

"Then we can install our lord as the future king."

They had intellect, they had skills with the blade…so why wouldn't they just stop playing around? Still, there was one last chance for our salvation.

"Could she succumb? That obstinate princess."

"Women can be persuaded, Father."

Princess Shalliceres had a low position in the succession, but the first and second princes had vanished along with their followers. The remaining

princes were but children. Meanwhile, heroic tales of Princess Shalliceres's renown had spread through the capital. A play that showed the princess battling dungeon Deluges along with House Omui had amassed wild popularity in the capital of late.

This plan wouldn't merely get us out of our present pinch—it would send our house straight to the throne. The ball would serve as the site of this gambit. Because our house hadn't participated in the war, we received a lowly seat at the table. We couldn't send soldiers.

"You won't have a seat near the head of the table," I said. "You won't be permitted to get anywhere close to such a hero."

The land of our noble House of Kasgill was not on the border. There were several merchant cities in Diorelle. One of which, the southern domain of Rondanool, led the alliance with the merchants. They aimed to install the second prince, a part of their family, as king.

Our house had only sons, so we never had a candidate for queen. We'd lost all of our trading business to the Merchant Kingdom. We'd turned to the eastern domain of Ghiesdacht's alliance with the church, but in the end, had no choice but to fall back on the House of Rondanool. We've been stuck frozen, as outsiders throughout this entire conflict.

House Schucobassis of the north could not move either. The duke was ill and bedridden, and the lone daughter was a captain of the first division. She was unable to take action. They, like our house, refused to send troops to the other houses' causes, suffering reprobation as a consequence. Our houses were allies, but the situation was perilous. Rondanool and Ghiesdacht would fall soon. It was true that the Schucobassis girl had achieved renown as a guardian of the border, making it inexcusable for our house to sit around and do nothing.

"I can hardly believe that both Merchant Kingdom and Theocracy fell, yet Diorelle survived."

Now the two meddlesome houses had fallen; the king was untouchable. But if we could get our hands on the princess… No, even if we couldn't, Lady Merielle, whose star had risen along with the princess's, would be more than enough.

I heard reports that the frontier had stabilized and grown into a prosperous land with a powerful army. Most importantly, they had secured a spellstone monopoly that had turned them into a powerful trading partner.

"You suggest targeting Princess Shalliceres and Lady Merielle? Either of them would be a great boon to our house. But how will you approach them?"

"Trust us. We'll find a way, Father."

"Yes, if we can find the black-haired beauties from the play, we'll be able to get to them."

What a cunning scheme. Both ladies were rumored to frequent the shop run by the black-haired foreigners. Indeed, there was a connection—if my sons could marry the ladies and take the black-haired women as their concubines, the kingdom would soon be ours!

My sons may have little skill beyond sensual pleasures, but they certainly knew their way around a woman. I wasn't expecting such useless sons to come to the rescue at a time like this.

"But how will you even approach the black-haired beauties?"

"Via their leader, of course. We'll capture the black-haired boy who was trying to escape from the theater and threaten them."

"And if he happens to…disappear, then they'll need help getting back to their homeland, wouldn't you say?"

The jester in the black cloak? Hm. Yes, the black-haired beauties all obeyed that buffoon of a boy, who—hardly a warrior—specialized in devious traps. It was hard to believe that in my old age, I was about to possess the whole kingdom of Diorelle. To have limitless wealth. To be able to slay any enemy who appeared.

"What do you need? Money, soldiers?"

"We'll need money first. Soldiers are a last resort, Father."

"Preparations won't be cheap. To seduce a servant, you must first seduce their master, after all."

They lied and schemed, threatened women's families, drugged them, and raped them. My sons spent most of their lives in that manner, draining

away my wealth with their little escapades, wasting my money and their lives. They bought drugs from shady apothecaries, gathered equipment with dangerous endowed effects, and embarked on their erotic adventures. For them to have a use now of all times… How unexpected. Soon they would challenge a virgin princess who knew nothing of this perilous world.

"We'll need especially potent drugs. They'll resist all the usual tricks —and getting caught would be a disaster."

"And on our way to give them the poisoned equipment, we'll need to sample the serving ladies as well."

The boys were tall with handsome faces, and they hailed from a noble background. They had quick hands and tongues and used any means necessary to get what they wanted. I never thought the day would come when I asked them for a favor. I couldn't skimp out on money now, of all times.

"Is this enough? If not, tell me. Don't think I'll accept failure, boys."

"Leave it to us, Father."

They needed to gather assassins and spies. Within the palace, force meant nothing. Was our small, insignificant house about to seize the kingdom by sheer seduction?

"Assume that if you fail, you lose your lives," I warned them. "This is the end of the road for House Kasgill."

Should their mission go poorly, our great house would be reduced to ordinary nobility, with no road back to our current status.

"Oh, we won't fail. Not when it comes to what matters."

"Yes. We just need to succeed in one area…then the rest will fall into place."

Those twins. It didn't matter if they died. I had many bastards waiting in the ranks.

"And we can just win over the jester with money!"

"It'd be easier to kill him. Dueling is a fine option to rid ourselves of him."

“If he wants to cooperate with our plan, then so be it. But if he interferes…we’ll kill him.”

The only fighting skill they had was dueling. They couldn’t even fend off monsters. And yet now, of all times, they might prove useful. I couldn’t count how many times their womanizing antics had caused me trouble, but they came out of every duel unscathed. Their swordplay would be worthless against monsters or on the battlefield, but one-on-one they were the best of the best. If I pretended that they had spent their whole lives training for this very moment, I almost felt proud.

“If we need to kill him, we’ll succeed. The rest will fall into place.”

Diorelle was destabilized. The great houses could no longer keep up with the economic and military power of the king.

But if we could force the Omuis and Diorelles into our family, the kingdom would be practically ours. Good thing I went to see that ridiculous play for the wretched masses. Now we could target their weak point—that jester—and crush them. All the fool could do in battle was wail and run around the castle. Soon, he would make his appearance at the ball. Until then, we had to prepare carefully.

We would achieve what the fallen Ghiesdacht and Rondanool could not. We’d seize the kingdom. If we ran into hard times from there, at least we would suffer from the top of the world. First, we needed to destroy the royals and the Omui family. Then, we could make this kingdom our own.

DAY 77

NOON

The orphans were taking the lovestruck maiden capital tour, so no wardrobe malfunctions this time.

SOUVENIR SHOP

ORPHANAGE BRANCH

IT WAS TIME for my classmate's greed to shine—er, I mean, the orphan field trip. The tour guide, Class Rep, was the one who gave out instructions. The orphans were good kids, so this was a lot easier than when she trained the meatheads.

"Okay, everyone's here. Now hold hands, okay?"

"Yes, miss!"

"Okay everyone, let's hold hands," said Elf Girl, a co-guide.

"Got it!"

Jiggle jiggle.

Tiny Tanuki was eager to experience the tour herself and blended in perfectly with the small children. *I think I'll withhold any chest comments. She's glaring at me!*

Miss Armor Rep and Dancer Girl were psyched about being miniskirt bus guides. They held up a sign that read "Lovestruck Maiden Capital Tour." A shame that there wouldn't be any wardrobe malfunctions this afternoon…

Our biggest concern was that the nerd brigade would get "lost." We resolved this worry by chaining them up. It was a real shame they had resistance against electricity, or I'd have used shock collars instead.

"Head right past the Golden Temple over towards Kiyomizu-dera," I said. "Oh, wait, actually go left of the Silver Temple, in between Kamigamo and Shimogamo Shrines. Then go straight past Nijo Castle and head into

the small road in the bamboo forest, cross the Togetsukyo Bridge, and once you get through Fushimi Inari Shrine, the exit's just through the red shrine gates."

"Huh? We don't need to walk down the road that goes from the Imperial Palace to Heian Shrine?"

"But what about the shops in between Nanzen Temple and the Suirokaku Water Bridge?"

"Pretty sure it's faster to go straight from the corner of Yasaka Shrine."

"I thought that's where the Moss Temple was? You're saying it's Ninna Temple?"

"Haruka-kun keeps building new landmarks. It's impossible to keep track!"

Once we left the orphanage (modeled after the Phoenix Temple), there was Seimei Shrine across the street, and then Tanukidani-san Fudo-in Temple out back. Daiunin Temple was on that corner, after which we just had to go a bit past the Rengeoin Sanjusangendo Hall of a Thousand Kannons. The population of the slum quarter increased—or rather, it had turned into chaos with the number of tourist spots, so that was the easiest path to avoid getting lost.

"If anyone from Kyoto saw this place, they would definitely think they've gone insane."

"Why'd he put Todaiji and Gohukuji from Nara in too? Is he ever going to stop?"

Even Kyoto locals would be running around this exciting maze, holding their teapots and rice bowls all Kyoto-style. If they had any complaints, I'd be more than happy to introduce them to some underground zombie friends.

"I think everyone'd throw their hands up in despair when they saw Izumo Shrine all the way from Shimane Prefecture was passin' for a dead-center landmark," commented Vice Rep B. "Oh, heeey! Since when did he finish Koto-In Temple?"

“There are new buildings every day!” shouted the nerds. “That’s why we get lost!”

“Why the heck did you turn the slum quarter into a mock Kyoto?!”

A maze-like town was a strong anti-crime measure, but apparently my classmates were against it. The Ring of the Destitute provided some GPS navigation, at least? Jeez, what more could my classmates ask for?

“You didn’t need to go *this* crazy on the capital! We get it, you’ve dominated it!”

We had to go at the orphans’ pace, so it took a while to get around. I needed to hurry up with my plans to get the orphans some speed boosts. Although speeding up their super-fast diving attacks in my direction could make things perilous. How were their tackle-hugs so accurate and yet rapid-fire? They were long-range kid missiles!

“Look at all the Buddhist statuary he’s added! And why is the goddess Benten-sama so sexy?!”

“Guilty verdict!”

“Uh, I mean Benten-sama, y’know, she’s, like, got a curvy lute so she’s gotta have curvy curves, right? I was just trying to appeal to the masses with a sorta cutting-edge magic lute sculpture, more like Benten premium magic hi-fi lossless audio quality and all, so really, I’m not the bad guy? I mean look, the nerds like her! Ya know?”

When I said I was gonna make her, the nerds showed up and gave me some drawings, which we stared at for a long while and then carefully constructed…huh? Was that a giant school locker pinup shaped like Benten-sama descending from the heavens? *That’s definitely the nerds, so I’m definitely innocent?* I mean, she was covered up—barely—so we were all safe to begin with.

The girls were pissed. We went through the ten thousand shrine gates and made it to the castle town. About 70 percent of the noble quarter had modeled itself after the slum quarter, so we had to somehow navigate our way through there too. Meanwhile, there was a huge waiting list for prospective slum quarter residents, who’d all built upscale housing as soon as they made it there. With all the tourists and celebrities, this really had turned into one fancy slum.

“Are you all wearing your Orphan Bracelets?” I called out. “If you get lost, remember to just raise your hand and concentrate. And if you see any bad guys, just kick them with the Orphan Boots! They’ll go flying. I tried them out on the nerds, so it should be a nice body-splitting goal kick.”

“Yes, Big Bro! We’re wearing them!”

Now I could easily find anyone who got lost, and they could even send up smoke signals. I gave them basic forcefields, and all of their clothing had top-class defensive power-ups. Their kicks should even be enough to deal with low-level enemies, and a dropkick from one of the older kids could even take out a goblin.

The castle was pretty close to the slum quarter, but the noble quarter had sucked up all the aid that the royals sent out due to its position between the slums and the castle. We had free time until the evening. The king said he was going to send out a carriage to greet us, but walking was quicker. I already had two carriages from the *Highway Orphan Liner* and remodeled them into the *Highway Orphan Star Train*. It was now faster and more spacious.

The goal was education. The orphans hadn’t spent even a cent of their salary. When I gave them the money, they just tried to use it to pay for food. If I handed the orphans money and sent them into town, they’d bring back ingredients. Such thoughtfulness could only be found in children.

What they needed was a role model.

With the current “role models” around them, they were on a one-way track to greed and bankruptcy! Those girls didn’t have a cent of savings despite working their asses off all day. I was worried the orphans might grow up with Peter Pan Syndrome and never adapt to real adult life. The girls showed the dangers of impulse buying and impulse bra-ing. I couldn’t allow them to sow the seeds of avarice in the hearts of those innocent orphans! They would grow up to be great kids if they could avoid the miserable morals the girls were modeling for them.

The orphans shouldn’t have to worry about saving for the future. A kid’s job is to play all day and fall asleep excited for another day of fun. That’s their right. So extravagant spending, extravagant fun—they were on a high-speed route to big spender city!

“Okay, here’s your pocket money for today,” I said. “Everyone line up—no, not you Tiny Tanuki, don’t act so docile! You can’t trick me into thinking you’re an orphan! You’re gonna start needing a maternity dress at this rate! What is this, your fifty-third trimester?”

“Fifty-third trimester?! How round do you think I am?!”

She still didn’t put her hand down. Hang on, it wasn’t just her—all the girls lined up! Even the nerdbrains joined them in line!

“Yeah, *Big Bro*, where’s our allowance?”

“All of the orphans are lined up nicely, so why are their guardians elbowing them for spots?! And we’re the same age, stop calling me Big Bro!”

Monkey see, monkey do. My classmates imitated the orphans’ behavior in a flash.

I handed out pouches of 5,000 ele each, chucking the change as hard as I could at the nerdarinos. I knew that the meatheads would be able to stop my blazing fastball fury attack, but even the nerds had somehow managed to hang on with Forcefield. *That ticks me off!* I guess that’s what they got for being level 100+ cheat skill-wielders. Even without the athletic reflexes, their skills were enough to fend me off.

The girls, whose mischievous grins sharply contrasted the confused look on the orphans’ faces, escorted the kids into the stores. *Oh man, they’re going to infect those kids, aren’t they?*

The capital’s toys and sweets were nothing to write home about. The souvenir shop had more options, and certainly higher-quality ones. It was fun to just splurge. That was the most important thing, wasn’t it? To do something stupid and still know that everything was going to be okay. I mean, the girls were on the brink of disaster with their crazy debt, but still.

The orphans were fidgeting and nervous about shopping at first, but eventually they lightened up. They started smiling. They started to show off what they bought to one another. *Those are normal kids,* I thought. *They don’t need to grow up too soon.* They *did* need to beware of debt, though. *Don’t become like the ladies, okay?*

Those ladies were hopeless…and starting to glance in my direction in hopes of more pocket change.

DAY 77

EVENING

It's never the right call to ask the elderly to speak. They always take so damn long!

KINGDOM OF DIORELLE

ROYAL PALACE

AT MY ADVANCED AGE, just as I considered stepping down, everything changed. The king fell ill, the kingdom fell into chaos, and the princes started a civil war. Everything had resolved itself in the end, or so I'd heard. This would be my last duty as chancellor: the victory ball.

I'd served this kingdom for many years; saw countless sights I'd sooner forget. If a celebration of this kingdom's savior was my final duty, I'd have no complaints.

The maids and butlers hurried quietly around the grand hall while the first few minor nobles arrived. Tonight would determine the fate of the kingdom. It would be a swordless battle between the nobles and the new, emerging order. We servants of the royal family must do our duty to defend the heroes of the frontier.

The only sound in the grand hall was the tuning of the instruments. The king had several suitable locations to host a ball within the castle, but this was the grandest of them all. This ball needed not just space but formality. This was a site worthy to praise the heroes of Diorelle, historically only used to celebrate the founding of our nation…and spacious enough for a battle, if need be.

We prepared as best we could. The king wished to express his heartfelt gratitude, so everything had to be perfect. I put every servant in the castle to work. The result would be enough to freeze every guest in place when they arrived.

This wasn't merely a hall for dancing; it was the site of awarding immortal acclaim and gratitude—a place that spoke to the king's authority.

A place to forge deep bonds. A grand ballroom that would shame treachery with its glory and wash away every seed of doubt and distrust. A glittering ballroom full of elaborately dressed nobles, a place for lively conversation. A place without pretense, swathed in music, fit for the melody of true friendship.

Tonight's ball was hosted by the king himself. Only the most important figures in the realm earned an invitation. Of those invited, few would dare refuse. Nobles arrived in droves, as expected. They were called in ascending order according to their rank and importance. Once inside, they scanned the room for their fellows, grouping themselves according to faction.

In normal circumstances, a ball would also allow these disparate factions to confer with one another and establish relations. But two of the former great houses had fallen, and the position of the remaining two remained uncertain. The long-lasting power structure of the nobility had completely collapsed, leaving all of the nobles uncertain of their allegiances.

The nobles hid their uncertainty beneath forced smiles, forming groups only after much pondering. This wasn't one of those ugly balls of the past, bound for unhappy endings—now, the nobles wandered like lost children, cautiously reaching out to one another in search of their guardians.

The lower-ranked nobles loitered closer to the entrance, with those called later in the afternoon moving further into the hall. Furnishings suitable to each family had been appropriately arranged according to status. The grand hall gradually came to life. The ladies in extravagant gowns and jewelry lent the room a colorful elegance befitting the occasion. Through genteel smiles, the nobles made small talk about the state of their domains, the weather, rumors, family happenings and other news.

Manners were of the utmost importance for the cream of society, and with those manners they hid an endless stream of deception. They learned about each other's circumstances and factions. They sought out uncertainties in the flow of conversation while keeping their guard up to hide their own weaknesses from their conversational partners. Power shifted subtly over the course of these conversations as they gently probed

for information. It was a melodrama of deceit. Lies and music blended together as the grand hall grew louder and boisterous.

The wives, sons, and daughters of the lords also greeted one another. They chattered about hairstyles and clothing as a proxy for discussing their finances and status. This was reconnaissance. Discerning who was friend and who was foe, their flowery language masked the malice behind every word.

The topics of conversation shifted from the news to rumors, and they subtly let their hidden intentions surface. They cowered as they mimicked strength, sought allies as they demonstrated hostility. The ballroom had become a microcosm of the newly disrupted noble society. As the empty conversation shifted over to more substantial recent developments, and as they began to discuss the news of the great houses, they determined who had allied with whom. They wanted information. That was the true topic of conversation here.

The discussion shifted to the frontier and its duke. Everyone in Diorelle knew who he was—he was a living legend, and they all feared that he would seek revenge against them. He was known as the King of the Frontier. He turned away from the frivolities of the nobles as he fought his endless war against the horrors of the frontier. He led the strongest military in the kingdom. None of them knew—or even had allies who knew—his disposition. Slowly, they realized he would remain a mystery to them.

They soon began to allude to the war, but no one directly brought up the subject. They were too scared to bring it up, and so the conversation hurried on to the theatrical performance that had gained great popularity in the capital of late.

However, since the true purpose of the ball was to put a formal end to the war, it was a topic that was difficult to avoid for long. Noble society was based on power and relationship to power, but now this society had lost half of its might. They glanced anxiously at one another, desperate for allies, and wondered desperately if they would be the next to fall.

There was hardly any time to enjoy the luxurious food and drink, which they praised even as they failed to taste them as they were so preoccupied with the business at hand.

The waiting staff served the food, delivering bottles of wine swiftly to each table. The orchestra played a soft tune, matching melody to atmosphere, singing a gentle song as the hall filled.

The grandeur of the arriving nobles increased, and the orchestra raised the volume to announce their arrival. The nobles shifted in response to the change in mood. They made fleeting eye contact and their eyes widened as they recognized a powerful figure with whom they wanted to connect. The wives praised one another's clothing as they scanned the room for someone more powerful to ensnare.

The grand hall overflowed with filthy greed. The ooze of their ambitions leaked out of their avaricious eyes and muddied the elegant carpets. Flowery words spilled out over the slimy hall, thick with hypocrisy, mistrust, and greed. This was the nobility. The servants called out the names of the new arrivals. Not many remained. Only the top-ranked nobles and the heroes of the evening.

"Duke Kasgill, Marquis of the Great Western House!"

The order was everything to the nobles. The ultimate determinant of hierarchy. The later you were called to the ball, the higher your position. Anything to make your name called just a little later in the order was worth any cost.

The king hosted this ball, so the order was his decision. The balance of power was being decided now—some would rise while others fell. The king's ranking meant everything. Getting promoted above your status was the only thing that mattered. Because for a lord, *that* was life or death.

The two remaining great houses were called. A hush fell over the grand hall, leaving only urgent whispers. House Schucobassis, previously the lowest of the four great houses, now stood at the top. Every noble in the building was shocked.

"Duke Schucobassis, Marquis of the Great Northern House!"

Voices venomous with resentment mixed with shouts of acclaim. All at once, the axis of the world had shifted for the inhabitants of this hall. This was not the last of the revelations, however.

"Now we will be introducing the guests of honor this evening. Viscount… Baron… Viscount… Viscount… Baron…"

Everyone held their breath. Shock and despair flitted across their faces. I understood why. These were guests of honor, ranked above the dukes of the great houses—and they were the lowest of the low, mere viscounts and barons. Did rank mean nothing?

No one had heard of any of these names. All the nobles could do was stare blankly as the unfamiliar figures passed. The nobles' faces were pictures of bafflement. All they could do was stare.

Suffice to say, more than a few people in the audience weren't bright enough to realize the disastrous consequences of attempting any scene (or assassination) at this ball. Their greed had consumed them long ago. They lacked the wisdom and precaution to understand what would befall them.

"Captain of the First Army Division, Lord Barbarella, and Captain of the Second Army Division, Baron Terisel!"

Some faces went blue with fear, others red with rage. Others went white as sheets and swayed, nearly falling unconscious at the sight. The commanders of the royal forces walked gracefully into the hall.

"Captain of the Imperial Guard, Princess Shalliceres du Diorelle!"

Calm and composed, clad in a splendid dress, the newly crowned hero Princess Shalliceres walked about halfway down the hallway before stopping and waiting.

"Duke Meropapa sim Omui, Duchess Murimour sim Omui, and Lady Merielle sim Omui!"

The room gasped at the significance of the Omuis arriving after a royal princess. I could see the terror in their eyes.

The atmosphere of the room changed. The world changed. The nobles took a step back without even thinking of why, craning their necks, as if physically struck by the news. The duke of the frontier, Lord Meropapa, and the former princess knight Lady Murimour. The blade princess and their daughter Lady Merielle. Just the presence of these three peerless heroes, destroyers of Dungeon Deluges, caused everyone to rock back on their heels. It was the family of legends renowned throughout the kingdom. They were nobles not only by name, but by deed.

The three of them reached Princess Shalliceres and then stood by at the opposite end of the hall, without yet joining the rest of the nobles.

“Lastly, our guest and benefactor from a foreign land, Lord Haruka and his comrades!”

Nobody could breathe. At some point, the orchestra and its music fell out of their perception. Even the butlers and maids had stopped in their tracks, entranced. The whole hall was held in a thrall.

This was the black-haired commander. These were the black-haired warrior maidens. Seeing them walk down the hall was like witnessing the very light of heaven: their unmatched beauty lit the grand hall. Everyone froze in place, breathless, watching. They seemed to be wrapped in an otherworldly light. Angels from another world.

The ladies, who by now had become legends in Diorelle, wore fine, radiant dresses of purest white, faces hidden by veils, as they calmly processed into the hall, as if sure they were protected by the strongest guardians in the land. In the middle walked a black-haired boy with an unpleasant expression. He seemed annoyed.

A mere twenty-something of these peerless beauties were rumored to have defeated three dungeons. They followed the boy walking among them. He was as nonchalant as if he owned the entire castle. Once they reached the hall’s center, Princess Shalliceres and the Omui family joined their convoy. And as they proceeded through it, the grand hall slowly began to look shabby in comparison to their presence.

These were heroes. These were legends. The nobles gasped for air like fish now that the otherworldly beings had left their eyeline. It was as if they had been reminded of their place in the world. The nobles couldn’t even look those beings in the eye. The foreigners hadn’t even deigned to give the important people in the kingdom slightest hint of interest or reverence.

The black-haired boy approached the king, without even kneeling, without even giving a greeting. They simply turned around and called back across the room.

“Hey, I almost forgot. Come on out! I dunno if we’re about to have an all-you-can-eat unlimited gourmet-gobbling food-fight festival or what,

but this party ain't getting started without the main characters! So get out here?"

"Coming!"

Beautiful children clad in gorgeous dresses and fine tuxedos ran out joyfully into the hall. The room stirred at the sight of the little angels. Behind the dashing children, tuxedo and tailcoat-clad young men strolled in. Every fighter in the room immediately took a step back in fear.

Thirty young men and women and a few dozen children were the highest-ranking individuals in the entire kingdom. This angelic, miraculous procession stood before the king.

"Ah, Haruka-kun, those kids…" called Duke Omui with a pinched smile. "Oh, it's fine. Never mind."

"Yo, nice to meet you? These are the kids who the kingdom bled dry and discarded. They have the right above everyone else to feast at this banquet, so I brought them. Ya feel?"

The room froze. Everyone sucked in their breath. The words were directed at the crowd of nobles who had diverted aid away from those penniless children. The boy spoke the words with a sheepish grin, as if it were an insignificant but incontrovertibly true fact. The grand hall buckled under the tension. They feared his smiling face. They listened to him talk, unable to even collapse unconscious out of terror. Nobody moved, nobody spoke, nobody breathed. Nobody dared.

Duke Omui stopped smiling and shifted his expression and posture. He became the avatar of rage itself. Visions of eternal death danced across the nobles' vision. At last, the king broke the silence. What would a reprimand, even a punishment, do to correct this boy's insolence?

"I'm sorry, children," the king said. "It is my failure as king to have not protected the weakest of my own citizens. It is my sin for not reaching out my hand to you while you suffered. I'm sorry."

The king descended from the throne before the orphans and lowered his head into a deep bow. The other royals bowed next, and the newly top-ranked nobility followed suit.

Everyone lowered their heads to the terrified, frozen orphans. What other reason could they have been brought here? They represented the kingdom's deepest rot. They were the children of the nobility's corruption. For the weakest children in the land, those who had lost their families, to be hurt even more by the kingdom's evils was unforgivable. Draped as they were in beautiful clothing and with smiles as bright as angels, they had nevertheless suffered through years dressed in rags. They'd been wracked with hunger day and night. They'd met with death, smeared in dirt and mud, where they dwelled in the ruined shacks of the slum quarter. The sin of this kingdom was burned into the minds of all present.

In an instant, the refined grand hall had transformed into a death row. *Death* resounded. Sumptuous, piping hot dishes lined the table. But now, the true meaning of Diorelle's indisputable sin lit up the eyes of the nobility. A flame of terrible knowledge illuminated their faces.

From the castle, you could see the noble quarter. Behind it lay the capital's shadow, the slum quarter. Just beyond this quarter's walls, children had starved. Here, nobles dined and feasted day after day. There, children suffered without aid. It was a miracle that they were still alive.

Thousands, tens of thousands of meaningless noble rituals and squabbles had taken place within these halls. They only mattered to the people in this castle. Yes, we all ought to lower our heads to these children. It broke all of the etiquette and rites of the nobility, indeed. If I had a problem with lowering our heads to these children now, then I would be no different from the despicable garbage who were glaring at the children from among the crowd of nobles.

But no, I thought. Comparing myself favorably to scum only excused my past wickedness. I truly wanted to apologize. Even if what our kingdom —*all* of the kingdom—did to those children was unforgivable, I should at least try. It was unprecedented for the king himself to offer such an apology. As the chancellor of this kingdom, I knew it was a horrific breach of protocol.

Yet. Only a king who could lower his head to children truly deserved the crown.

The king had been destined for his role his entire life, but today was the day he earned the title. We had also failed him, of course. We were the

ones who provided him his education. Along with the instructors, I too failed him, telling him to always wield the authority of the king. I'd said that while the nobles rule the masses, the king rules the nobles—that the king is all. Thus, he should never bow his head. That miseducation had led us down this dark path.

These children were my responsibility. They were my unatonable sin. *When did I go down the wrong path?* Perhaps we elders were the problem to begin with. The man who bowed his head to these children was the King of Diorelle we ought to have been serving all along.

The words chiseled into the throne of Diorelle, which I polished every day of my career, read *A King for the People.* Until now, all they'd been were words.

DAY 77

NIGHT

The saddest deed in the world is stuffing a mushroom into an old dude's mouth.

DIORELLE CAPITAL

ROYAL PALACE

NOW I JUST HAD to sit and wait. My buttocks ached, as did my back. I wanted one of those so-called massage chairs. Perhaps I'd have one made into a throne. *I'll send out a messenger to the souvenir shop.*

It had been a remarkably peaceful ball, considering the stakes. At this rate, the Diorelle family would have its full authority restored. The corrupt nobles had fallen into an uncomfortable silence.

The orchestra played splendid music as the dressed-up nobles pasted on their fake smiles and jabbered. As always, a ball was an occasion for plots and intrigue. In the midst of it, dashing, playing children injected life and joy into the scene. This was only in the private salon, reserved for the most esteemed guests, however. The rest of the grand hall had fallen into disorder.

The rest of the nobles scrambled about in confusion, gathering and discussing the events of the evening in fearful tones, glaring with anger and resentment. Only a small few had any traces of a genuine smile. The ladies glared at the laughing children in sheer jealousy, not hiding their anger at sharing a room with *lowly orphans*, and that mere orphans had better clothing and a higher rank than themselves. They were angry that the personal embodiments of their misdeeds were attending this ball.

The Omuis played freely with the children, but I had to confront this unaddressed sin. The unspeakable, unseemly disgrace that was Diorelle. "The nobility follow the king, the nobility protect the people." Every noble uttered those words upon receiving their title, but did they protect the people? No! They had disdained them!

“Your Majesty, Lord Schucobassis would like to offer his greetings,” my chancellor said.

“Despite his illness? Very well.” I turned to the fellow. “What do you think of all this?”

The chancellor had looked after me ever since I was a child, and now in his old age, he was on the verge of retirement. I wanted to hear his wisdom. It far outstripped mine. I was a fool.

“I must offer an apology, as worthless as one is coming from me. What I taught you was nothing but the desiccated old bones of worthless legends. Forget all of the customs and ceremonies I have taught you. All you need to know is what is inscribed on your throne—*A King for the People*. That is the only thing you must never forget. The children’s smiles today have taught me that much.”

The old fellow looked over at the playing children and then lowered his head to the black-haired boy. I went over to meet Duke Schucobassis, glancing back at my chancellor. *Since when could the stiff man smile like that?* I’d never seen it before.

“Your Majesty, congratulations on your return to health and your victory in the war,” said Duke Schucobassis. “I could not be more ashamed that I could do nothing to help you in your time of need.”

Gripping his cane, he took a knee with the support of a servant. He was a great bear of a man, but old age had greatly diminished him.

“In your condition, I could hardly ask you to lead an army,” I told him. “It was out of your control. I had to leave things to Lady Barbarella. Your house has done more than enough to assist her.” I lowered my voice. “I was the most useless one of all, you see. I couldn’t even issue the command to my brother to lead the army.”

“I am grateful for your generosity, my king.”

It must have been hard for a mighty warrior house to admit that they hadn’t gone to the battlefield. Still, the nobles made that decision, not House Schucobassis. The other nobles had cleverly sealed them off from both the domain and the capital.

“But I’ve calmed down from before,” he said. “I cannot recall feeling such terror in ages, be it from dungeon or battlefield.”

His haggard face resuscitated into a strong smile as he spoke. It must have been the blood of a warrior boiling inside his veins.

“Not many recognize his strength,” I said. “Most of the nobles did little more than scurry around, clueless about what transpired. They’re poor swords for this kingdom. How can they protect anybody if they don’t even recognize danger?”

Everyone could have died in the recent conflict. It was fully within the boy’s power. An apology shouldn’t have been enough to save us. He’d backed off for our sake, but we had not deserved mercy. I doubted that our sentence had yet been fully commuted.

“What will you do, my liege? Is this where we shall die?”

“Shalliceres relayed the message. In order to save the kingdom, the kingdom must die.”

When I woke up from my long sleep, my daughter had grown up. Before, that silly girl was nothing but a fighter. Now she was a princess. What had she learned? What did she experience? I saw unwavering determination, a steeled resolve burning in her eyes.

The role of the king was to protect the people. Our enemy…was the nobility. We were descendants of those who lent their strength to build the might of the kingdom, forging alliances under the common oath to protect the people. That oath had been broken.

“Where did Diorelle go wrong?”

“The kingdom did no wrong, my king. *They* betrayed the pact forged by our ancestors. That is all.”

All was peaceful here in the salon with the few men and women I could trust. When the dancing began, the barriers dividing the upper salon and the lower rooms would be removed, and everyone would intermingle as one. *Is this going to end without incident?*

“Be assured, my liege. I am old, but my children can protect themselves. There is but one path to a peaceful amends. That applies

equally to the black-haired foreigners. I do not think we need to worry about them."

This ball would determine the course of our kingdom's future. If the nobles relented, then this kingdom would be on a path towards peaceful reform. If they disagreed, then it would be war.

"Urgh… This old dude is looking sick. Everything about sick old dudes sucks. They're so sucky they achieve the Platonic form of suction on a theoretical plane of abstraction. Sick old dudes will sickify young orphans with their suckiness. The suckiest deed in the world is having to shove mushrooms into old dude mouths. What a waste! Ugh, open your mouth? Eat my mushroom!"

The black-haired boy appeared out of nowhere, uttering incomprehensible nonsense as he stuffed a mushroom into Lord Schucobassis's mouth, forcing it down his throat. From the side, I saw Lord Meropapa and Lady Murimour laughing. Was this how the boy had healed me?

"I see, I see," I chuckled. "Yes, mushrooms from their original birthplace are singular. I remember barely being able to swallow a mushroom of that size. Do you have a knack for squeezing them into people's mouths?"

"No, *hell no!*" he shouted. "Having to stick mushrooms into old dudes' mouths has already caused me a crapton of psychic damage. Why would I have a knack for producing ungodly sights I never wanna see in my life? Ugh, old dudes need to disappear already!"

Old *dude*? He had a point—it wasn't a pleasant scene to witness. I didn't see what the problem with normal medicine was, but since the technique had saved my life, I had no right to criticize.

"Lord Schucobassis has gone into convulsions," I observed. "Will he be all right?"

His eyes had gone white and his whole body was twitching. I thought I saw some color return to his flesh, but it could have been that he was choking.

"Oh, no biggie," the boy said. "If he suffocates to death, then we'll have one fewer old dude in his world. If he doesn't, he'll be a fit and

fighting old dude with his old-dude stink and old-dude attitude. Ugh, what a nuisance!"

Lord Schucobassis got up. I had to admit, it was impressive of the boy to shove a fat mushroom into the mighty warrior's mouth, as ill as he may have been.

"I can't believe it!" he gasped. "Was that one of the legendary healing mushrooms that I've heard of?! Lord Haruka, I must thank you for bestowing one of your priceless mushrooms upon me. You may call me Schucobassis the Old Dude if you wish. All the pain is gone from my body. Thank you!"

He bowed repeatedly. Just moments ago, he needed to use his cane to support his weight. Now he stood with perfect posture. His figure looked even larger than before.

"Lord Schucobassis, you are sadly mistaken," said Duke Omui. "For this boy won't even do me the favor of remembering my name. In fact, he can't even remember the name of our domain! When he delivered plans for the frontier, they were labeled with 'Project Omuwhatever City? Ya know, the place with all the clubs?' All of the bureaucrats were quite flummoxed."

He didn't even remember Meropapa's name. He didn't even remember the name of the kingdom he saved. He was that disinterested in us and our affairs. Perhaps I could be the first he remembered. But no, I couldn't let myself be charmed by it. He must have the closest feelings for Lady Murimour, as his nickname for her seemed very familiar. "Mrs. Murimuri" was clearly a rank in closeness and affection above the more distant "Mr. Meridad." I heard he didn't even call my own daughter by her name.

I never expected this kingdom, with all the doom that had befallen it, to be graced again by the laughter of children. The boy himself was known by many names, and if I was not mistaken, one of them was "the Arch-Enemy of Common Sense."

Simply put, the shackles of history, legends, and what was commonly understood as possible meant nothing to him. Somewhere along the way, we fell into believing them to be absolute. That boy opened the gates. He'd wandered into the twisted prison of this castle and freed us all.

Certainly, the first time the boy stole into this impregnable castle—eating a boxed lunch no less—he'd smashed my conception of the possible. How had he so easily entered and exited this castle's labyrinth of dead ends? It was as if this castle were no more than another dungeon to him. That fit neatly into his second-most-common epithet—"The Dungeon Destroyer."

He destroyed the dungeon of common sense long ago. I knew it the moment I saw him with his little lunch box. And what's more—it looked delicious. Truly, it did.

DAY 77

NIGHT

Yell all you want, but I'm having a ball in the middle of the ball and you're not gonna reach my telephone?

KINGDOM OF DIORELLE

ROYAL PALACE

I STILL CAN'T MOVE? Still no movements to move?

Looked like the cherry-stem-twistin' old dude was taking care of the sneaky assassin-type dudes hanging out outside, so the ball was staying sedate. Right now, a few couples were dancing in the space in front of the orchestra, but the true ball was yet to come.

I wanted to give the orphans a rest before it did, and Slimey was with them so I knew they'd be safe. The big-shot second-division dude also agreed to help, as did Princess Girl's Imperial Guard. They had to have the feast before the main dance started, and as of now there were a few light appetizers placed against the wall.

Slimey had split up into mini-Slimeys and was hanging out with the orphans. I'm sure they were all playing together now. A portable Slimey for each orphan would pretty much guarantee their safety—any assassin, or kidnapper, or dungeon king, or demon king would get gobbled right up. It'd also reduce food costs, which would be a huge help.

It was socializing time. When the real ball began, the tables would get cleared, the whole hall would turn into a dance floor, the dividers would get removed, and all the nobles would intermix. Even the servants would get in on it eventually.

At the same time, that Elf Girl had a rare skill, Emotion Sensing. She told me she could sense anger and worse. The nobles who filled the lower hall were seething with foul emotions: bloodlust, and malice, and resentment, and bitterness, and jealousy, and prejudice. They were afraid. At the moment, she was doing me the favor of searching out individuals

with especially strong malice. She searched for any notion of *poison*, *drugs*, and *magic*.

I had finally met some real maids. But in a truly tragic development, there were no sexy female assassins in sight.

I didn't think I'd get any responses by shouting in the middle of the hall, "Hey, are there any sexy female assassins in here?" but it'd been worth a shot. I tried probing some suspicious maids with Presence Sensing, but the only maid in the room with any bloodlust was Maid Girl herself…? Yeah, Princess Girl's shadow was glaring at me. Did she still resent me for the dress-measuring incident, over which I held no responsibility whatsoever? True, she stayed in the shadows, so she didn't technically *need* a dress. That meant dragging her into the crazed hellscape of tentacle measuring had been a little bit unnecessary. Perhaps she could've gotten one of those seventy-five-days-in-advance appointment cancellation plans, although I had barely been in this world for seventy-five days, so it clearly wasn't my fault. All of this was that old god dude's fault to begin with, so just burn the church, okay? *I've got plenty of oil.*

A lot of the nobles kept glancing over in my direction. Wisdom was keeping track of them, but there were so many. Actually, only a tiny percentage of them weren't staring, so what was the point of being coy about it to begin with? True, Miss Armor Rep and Dancer Girl were such beautiful babes that they blew the minds of everyone who bumbled by. Class Rep's squad was a bevy of similarly leggy beauties (plus one Tiny Tanuki). They didn't need the dresses to be more beautiful than everyone else in the room. Yet they had mastered the art of modeling those dresses, and were lovely enough to stand alongside Miss Armor Rep and Dancer Girl (yes, even when technically including one Tiny Tanuki). I'm sure the nobles were eyeing them. Everyone else was a wallflower by comparison.

The nobles' wives and daughters glared at all of us too. Elf Girl grumbled about how using Emotion Sensing was difficult. *Uh, don't you realize you're also an object of their envy?* Yeah, I could imagine not being happy about putting all your effort into dressing up for a ball only to find a group of beauties this mind-blowing had totally outclassed you.

I wanted to get out of there. *We're on the verge of a bullying outbreak!* The girls all lined up and followed after me, but the moment we

stopped, they naturally broke out into groups, all of which stared in my direction? They had veils on, but I could see their facial expressions. Those weren't glares. *Unfortunately?*

That made me stand out all the more. All the girls looked like my followers. We *seriously* stood out.

I mean, these were the gals who kept trying to whack me with morning stars on the way over here! They weren't my followers! They literally wanted to bury me!

I quickly asked them if they wanted to eat and sent over some plates, which they accepted with a quiet "thank you" and bowed heads? When I handed out the mushroom-cream spaghetti (mountain-size), they whipped out Three Kingdoms-worthy war tridents for twirling the noodles. They put holes in the *mithril-upgraded* plates I worked so hard to make! *Those weren't forks for eating, that's for sure!*

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With vulgar smiles and crude tones, my foolish sons evaluated the daughters with indecent banter. The moment the princess and Miss Merimeri entered the scene, their facial expressions betrayed a whole new low of vulgar fantasy. The idiot sons of our noble Kasgill house radiated sleaze. If they managed to succeed in stealing the girls' virginity tonight despite their transparently ill intent, we would undoubtedly rise to the top of Diorelle in a flash.

Were they to fail, our entire house would be at risk of destruction. The reward of success was equally great. If they managed it, the kingdom would be mine. Witnessing the astounding beauty of the Omui girl and the princess, I could see something change in their eyes. The girls were legends within the kingdom, but they rarely showed their faces at social occasions. Seeing them without armor and in elegant, pristine dresses only multiplied their beauty. They were magnificent flowers in full bloom.

The atmosphere of the hall changed upon their arrival. But when the last group to be called, the rumored jester and his black-haired maidens, arrived on the stage, every last lord in the hall fell speechless. The princess

and the Omui girl had elicited gasps and lovelorn sighs. Now, everyone's breath was stuck in their throats.

These perfect beauties whose pure-white dresses glittered and sparkled with the light of heaven with their luscious black hair as soft as polished crow feathers—rumors of them had swept through the kingdom. The rumors hadn't done them justice.

The whole crowd of nobles could say nothing. Indeed, they were boiling with rage at that jester for bringing in filthy orphans to gambol and frolic all over the grand hall, reeling at the shock of not only the Omuis's presence here, but that of the raven-haired beauties too. Even an elf served the boy. The nobility was ready to kill him.

"Father, I've changed my mind. He's dead."

"Yes. Kill him, then take his women."

Certainly not just my sons, but countless nobles in the room were overtaken by lust and greed. They must be hatching plots to make those maidens their own. How many of us had failed to consider them as spoils until laying eyes on them? No one, not a single person had ever won a prize as enviable as those women. Seizing the kingdom would be a trifle compared to taking and enjoying those girls.

We could not hesitate. There were many factions of nobles gathered here in the hall. Elegance would win this fight, not weaponry. We could not afford to fear Omui or Schucobassis here.

I had considered feigning illness and leaving the task to my sons as recently as this morning, but now I was glad that I came.

These priceless jewels were within my grasp, and I would take them. There would be no retreat.

***

Even after his formal introduction to society, I could not discern the black-haired boy's social rank. I supposed it was none of my concern. He may have been the savior of the capital, but he had rejected all acclaim and reward, setting out immediately to the frontier to devastate an army of forty

thousand alone. Part of me wanted to serve him, but realizing I'd only be disliked after our personal introduction, I kept our interaction at just that.

Ultimately, to him, I was merely another target of derision alongside Lord Omui. He existed in a world apart from ours altogether.

The duke of the great house of Schucobassis himself had lowered his head in gratitude to the boy. He was a warrior known as the Fierce Tiger, the lord of one of the four great houses of Diorelle. For him to lower his head to the boy caused quite a commotion.

That ridiculous play was the cause of all this misapprehension. That play was the reason nobody in the kingdom knew the true reason that the capital survived the war without bloodshed. The hero who defended the frontier alone, who led his comrades to defeat the dungeon Deluges, had been turned into comedic relief. A mere bumbling jester. That play mocked the savior of the kingdom and all of its people.

As soon as I heard about the play, I went to see it. I'd felt a dizzying surge of anger. Part of me wanted to charge on to the stage, seize the actors by the shoulders and shake them, shouting the truth to the world.

It was abominable. How could I accept that the boy who fought solely for the people, all alone, would be mocked and scorned? Contemplating how the miracles he'd gifted this kingdom went unrewarded, unattributed—I wanted to hang the theater troupe at the gates of the capital for all to see.

In the play, an actor wearing a black wig and black cloak gave orders to the beautiful warrior maidens and then hid behind them with ostentatious arrogance. He hysterically screamed as he fled his enemies, who chased him around the castle.

The audience around me burst into cruel laughter and taunts. The savior of all of us, the guardian of the kingdom, the reason that everyone in the capital was standing alive and well today—they pointed at him and laughed.

What could be more terrible? Where would you ever witness a scene so unbearable?

I kept my feelings to myself for those painful hours. As soon as the audience left their seats, I stormed straight to the stage. As the commander

of the second royal division, I'd had good seats. I was prepared to kill every last one of them, but not until I wrung apologies out of their miserable necks—until I encountered the playwright himself.

Immediately, I approved the script with my own seal. Why wouldn't I? The boy handed it to me himself.

***

We would stay close by his side. Our class, the princess, Merielle-sama, and her father were all lionized as heroes. Meanwhile, the hoity-toity nobles sneered and laughed at our black-haired commander. They'd showered him in boos as he left the playhouse, berating him to the point of stoking their own bloodlust. When he'd tried to run away, they hooted and jeered all the more.

This is unforgivable! Mere words wouldn't help. Everyone thought that we were lowly subordinates, just following orders. So the princess and Merielle-sama helped us out. We wouldn't let the jeering and heckling reach Haruka-kun at any cost. We wouldn't allow anyone to bother him!

For those few hours, we were happy to be his subordinates. What was wrong with protecting our leader? We all wanted that duty, even though we were too weak to really achieve it.

He was our leader. Whether we were his subordinates or servants or classmates, his partners, friends, or slaves—we deliberately walked into the most dangerous place in the world for him.

I knew he didn't care about getting heckled. He'd protected everything that he wanted to protect, so he was probably content as could be. But to us, this derision was unacceptable. Why did he have to get taunted and scorned by the people whose lives he saved? Why was the world so cruel?

All of the nobles saw the play too. We needed to protect him so that no one could approach him or taunt him. *I'll never let these nobles, who never even tried to protect their own people, be mean to Haruka-kun. He saved everyone in this whole city!*

Today was business. We came steeled, ready to be his followers, ready to become his shield. We'd gladly be his servants or slaves if it meant keeping him safe.

Haruka-kun had given us all we had: our happiness, our joy, our freedom. If the nobles thought that we were his subordinates, then we'd be his shameful, ill-mannered servants. Today, we served as Haruka-kun's sword and shield. We would use swords, spears, even poison if need be. Haruka-kun himself had no defense against scorn and mockery. He had no intention of even trying to defend himself. It was down to us.

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With the orchestra assembled and preparations complete, the music filled the grand hall. It was time to dance. At last, the ball had begun.

The king began his speech: in these times of war, great deeds had raised the stars of many. He would begin with those low of rank and who contributed little.

Indeed, those men did a lot of nothing. But even having fallen to ruin, they were still swords of His Highness. They were the leaders that could yet save this kingdom. These were the few who'd known of the orphans' plight, and though they had little to give, despite every reason to believe their efforts would be futile, had attempted to shuttle aid to those children. They had rebelled against corruption, and, as a consequence, were expelled from the noble quarter. They lost their bureaucratic positions, remaining nobles only in name, but still gave what little money and resources they had to the royal family in their time of need.

When the king fell ill, and as a consequence, control had been wrested from his grasp, they rushed not to one of his sons, but to the *king's* side. They knew they would lose the war, but still, they did not turn their backs on him. True, they did very little, those nobles. The fact that they had tried to help the orphans meant that this kingdom still had a soul. If no one had, we would all be truly, truly done for.

The king gave out rewards to all the various divisions, but this man announced he was abdicating. That he could not accept any reward.

The chancellor had always been an unskilled child, but still did everything he could to obey our teachings. They called him the Prince of Fools, but that merely meant we teachers had failed him. “Matters of royals, nobles, and civilians are separate, so do not intervene,” and “A wise king listens closely to the opinions of the nobility”—we subjected him to the abuse of these lessons. It was *our* responsibility.

Abused, disparaged, and spit upon in the city, the chancellor had no choice but to abdicate, totally convinced that it was all his own fault. The only reason he had cheered up, no doubt, was because of the stage play.

He fell prey to the deception, trickery, and villainous nature of that black-haired commander. He’d been made a Prince of Fools, dancing according to that boy’s whim. And yet, that Prince of Fools, upon hearing that the black-haired commander and warrior maidens risked their lives to fulfill their oath unto him and fight against the dungeons, began a mad struggle of his own to contribute. In the end, they couldn’t let him leave. They’d allowed him to fight alongside them. It was a tale of redemption. Even a fool could contribute to the kingdom’s salvation.

All the blame had been shifted on to the black-haired commander; people forgave the king for that reason alone. The royals regained the trust of the people with the accomplishments of the princess. All the failures were placed on one clown of a commander.

In public opinion, all acclaim belonged not to the black-haired boy, but to the warrior maidens and the young men who’d journeyed to save the Beast Kingdom. It was framed that the king had ordered them to do so. When the people sang praises of their heroes, they praised their king by proxy.

Meanwhile, in the palace, not a single person knew of the terror that was befalling the beastfolk. Without anyone knowing those foreigners went to save them, they’d solved the crisis. Now that it was widely known, the credit was given strategically. By claiming the king ordered the dispatch, Diorelle could now stand on even ground with the Beast Kingdom, laying the groundwork for future relations. It was the best possible outcome for Diorelle from a strategic perspective.

The Duke of the Frontier gained further renown as a hero and received credit alongside the royal family. Honor was distributed in a

calculated manner, designed to obtain the best strategic outcome. This meant the boy got none. Less than none—he received only scorn.

In the end, he managed to convince the king to accept this was for the best. It was the only way to save the kingdom and its people.

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Music resounded throughout the hall—the ball was in full swing. Its tempo was dictated by the swinging hands of the black-haired commander, the black-haired clown, and it was a brilliant production indeed.

DAY 77

NIGHT

More hyperdrive overwork keeps piling up nonstop with no retreat.

DIORELLE CAPITAL

ROYAL PALACE

THIS BALL WOULD MARK the end of my time as chancellor, the end of my service. Hence I would not allow any more impudence from the nobles. I would not allow more shame to befall that black-haired boy or danger to assault this kingdom.

A foreign guest saved the frontier, saved the kingdom, and did not receive his due acclaim. All for the sake of the royal family. It was my meagre consolation to offer him this feast. The fate of this kingdom revolved around the reception of the orphans. The very history of this kingdom, all its legends, hung in the balance.

The nobles at this ball sneered at that very boy, spat upon him, reviled him. Bad intentions radiated from every corner of the hall. Much of it was open envy for the warrior maidens. The boy's despised status would do little to dissuade dirtier tactics.

The nobles prided themselves on their refinement, so they intended to find faults with today's banquet. They needled and they dug at it to express their frustration. They may have lacked skills with the blade, but that wouldn't dissuade the nobles from attacking the boy with the social weapons at their disposal.

Nevertheless, the ball had begun. The orchestra's music suffused the hall, transforming its atmosphere. Servants began to remove the dividers that had been splitting up the upper and lower ranks.

The awards ceremony had concluded, and the rites for the formal ball started in earnest. The black-haired boy had received neither award nor acclaim—the king had only tipped his hand by calling the boy last.

The guest of honor processed to the middle of the hall, alone. He paused there with a bored expression. The nobles pointed and cackled as they jeered at him ruthlessly:

"Where's your partner?"

"Learn the dances, country bumpkin!"

"Motley fits you!"

The music played. The instruments sang out throughout the hall. And then, the world danced.

The entire hall gasped sharply. Everyone gazed, wide-eyed, as he began a majestic string of complicated footwork, dancing so fast and fluent it left behind afterimages. He stood alone, in the center of the floor as the world taunted him before raising his right arm and taking a single step. Yes, just one step.

He seemed to vanish, springing across the floor to the group of maidens waiting at the edge of the hall, swooping a blonde beauty off of her feet. He placed his hand in the small of her back. The pair sprung into dance. It all happened in a single beat of a song.

What happened next swept over the entirety of the grand hall. Their shimmering dance left mirages as they swept across the floor at godlike speeds, maintaining perfect elegance and refinement, each spin unleashing a pure-white twirl of cloth. The goddess shifted her feet from heel to toe, to the inside edge, outside edge, and back again in an unending loop of precise footwork. The pair swept across the dance floor as if in flight, leaving traces of dreamlike beauty in their wake.

She matched the infinite variety of his lead with a flawless follow. They maintained their breathing, their posture, their distance from one another, then rested together for a moment before sweeping out once more in a reverse spin.

Their footwork achieved perfection. Sashay into weave, curved feather-back feather-feather finish, followed up by a twist-and-turn. They made countless artful, beautiful spins, one after the next—a seamless blend of swing and foxtrot.

It was masterful. An elegant dance the likes of which this kingdom had never seen. They combined the traditional steps of Diorelle with brand

new, intricate footwork and dramatic movements.

A collective intake of breath. The girl danced like a goddess of war, brandishing her sword on the battlefield. The whole hall watched in utter enchantment.

The moment the song ended, the boy swapped partners, taking a black-haired beauty. She spun after his lead with long, graceful strides. Sighs swept over the hall. The crowd watched in delight as the boy switched over to yet another girl at the end of the song. This was a one-man show that no one dared to match.

The nobles had been pointing and laughing at him, but now they sputtered. It was as if they had forgotten how to scheme. They had no chance of keeping up with the dance, be it with bow, sword, or magic, that powerful elegance. No one had any hope of anticipating such complex, unpredictable movements to cut him down. One moment he appeared in one position only for the audience to realize it was a mirage. He was already dancing further ahead.

The boy even danced with the princess and the duke's daughter. Nobody else dared to join in. How could anyone intrude on such masterful footwork?

He'd hijacked the dance floor, leaving the rest of the nobles wallflowers. They were inconsequential, now, and they knew it; there was room but for one hero.

He took each black-haired warrior maiden by the hand. This ball belonged to the boy. He danced, maintaining the oppressive atmosphere that forbade lesser dancers from intruding upon such beauty.

The nobles glared on, entranced and envious in equal parts. As much as they longed to seize this technique as their own, its complexity eluded them.

The boy danced with each of the twenty-something maidens, bringing out the full bloom of their beauty. All he'd done was invite them to dance, and then followed through. That alone was enough to overwhelm the nobles, to nullify their devious plots and schemes.

Even if they assembled a force to attack him, how could they catch him? How could they defeat such grace? A hundred soldiers swinging their

swords wouldn’t leave so much as a scratch.

Leer and ogle at the maidens as they may, none of the lusty, greed-possessed nobles could muster the courage to ask them to dance. Attempting to keep up with them would result in a torn muscle at the very least. The black-haired boy was the only one who stood a chance at matching their power and grace.

The maidens waited patiently before and after, and put on radiant smiles as they danced, leaving every noble in the room unable to do so much as speak to them. They could only watch. These nobles, who used money and power to seize whatever women they wanted in this world, stood by powerlessly. Their daughters and wives, lavished in expensive dresses and jewelry, didn’t even have the courage to move to the dance floor. The shame of being seen alongside such magnificence would only lead them to despair.

The foolish nobles did not understand the significance of destroying dungeons. They did not understand their own position. That they were in no position to deserve a dance, not without fighting. Not at their low and pitiful levels.

The last song came on before the first intermission. Everyone’s breath stalled as time flew by. It was like being caught in a dream.

The last maiden to dance had skin of golden-brown. Another unmatched beauty. This concluded the full lineup. What wonder could possibly exceed what had already come?

He isn’t taking her hand? They struck their first poses apart. They approached nearly close enough to touch, but they remained separate, maintaining eye contact.

After a moment of silence, the last song began. This was a foreign song that the boy requested from the orchestra. The pair began to move in sync to the fierce, beautiful melody.

Everyone was possessed by the beauty of this unknown dance. It was infused with furious intensity and insatiable passion. They struck the floor with their feet and clasped their hands together in unison. Somehow, it never became vulgar. In fact, its artistry was almost purifying. Their technique was inimitable in its intricacy, freezing every soul in its tracks.

As the song lifted up in exaltation, so did their movements—a drama of raging passion. Then, at the song's climax, he held the girl in his arms, nearly falling to the ground. And then, it ended.

Thunderous applause broke out in the hall. Even those who despised the boy clapped and clapped. Anyone who disdained such peerless beauty would instantly lose credibility, so they had to clap even if they didn't want to.

Although they may have forgotten their honor as nobles, some tiny scrap of their refinement remained. The manners and customs of the dance were drilled into them. They must respect the impeccable refinement of such a dance. As much as they wanted to insult the boy, they could not now. Not with what they'd just seen.

The mouths of the nobles who came here to mock the boy had been sealed shut. It would be improper to hold such skill in contempt. The boy had shown them the *true* art of ballroom dance, the pride of Diorelle's nobility. He crushed the noble's mightiest weapon—their words.

The nobles could no longer make a pretense for a fight with the boy by bumping into him, making him spill liquor on their dresses, or all the other devious schemes that they specialized in. No, their mouths were shut. How could they even hope to tangle themselves up in such footwork? They were powerless.

Lord Terisel of the second royal division had said it was presumptuous to worry about the black-haired boy. He was right. I'd underestimated him. This boy, unknown to the kingdom and the world, was the true savior of all of us. His deeds should be passed down in legend forever.

DAY 77

NIGHT

I don't think damsels in distress should be attacking me with morning stars every day.

DIORELLE CAPITAL

ROYAL PALACE

HARUKA-KUN WOULDN'T STOP grumbling about how tired he was, but Angelica-san taught me that his ears go a little bit pink when he gets shy.

It turned out he felt shy to just hold hands and put his hands on my back while we were dancing. What did it mean that a sex god was shy about dancing with girls, though?

"Aaaaaaaaaaah, I'm so tired—so friggin' tired, ya know? Why do I have to be everyone's partner? Is this a battle royale and y'all are just gonna start killing each other? And how did the nerds manage to escape? They're definitely dancing! We'll have ten guys with the nine of them if we put Vice Rep A in a tuxe—uh, never mind. Yes, you look bewitching in a dress. Like an actual witch. Wait, no, not like that!"

The other girls quickly stepped in to calm down Vice Rep A's boiling wrath.

"Restrain yourself, okay? You can wring him like a towel later."

"Yeah, you can't take out the morning star here, so hold back! You can do it!"

Today's a day for Haruka-kun, so bear it for his sake. The nobles didn't seem like they had given up yet. Our Status-Ailment Nullification stayed constantly activated. Someone was trying to get at us.

The (drugged) food kept coming. We kept intercepting it, but there was no end in sight.

At the very least, the scorn directed at Haruka-kun had vanished. They stopped jeering and just glared now. We could bust those eyes in later.

It ticked me off that they hated him so much because of the play. It wasn't fair that the person who contributed the most got the least credit. *Maybe I won't wait. Maybe I'll bust in some of their eyes right now.* They kept glaring over in his direction, but what would they do if Haruka-kun glared back? Monsters from the lower levels of the Ultimate Dungeon couldn't resist his glare. He'd even made a demon burst into tears. The nobles would probably die of shock if they witnessed it. So why were they still glaring? They had some serious guts, glaring at the person with a more deadly glance than the instant-killing evil eye monster.

Our diamond rings kept glittering and changing colors, from red to blue and back to transparent again. That signified they were warding off a constant rain of mental attacks, from Seduction to Hypnosis to Entice. People kept flinging poisoned needles and shooting darts at us. We held them all off just fine.

The bigger problem was that using psychological ailments on maidens like us was absolutely unacceptable. We would not allow them to defile our bodies. Most of us were pissed. We wanted to kill the perpetrators.

For Haruka-kun's sake, we held back. We'd be fine. Entice, Hypnosis, Seduction, sure—but they were all low-level, so they couldn't get past the powerful Allure and legendary Charm Haruka-kun had endowed our clothes with. The spells simply ended up replenishing our MP in a nice recycling process.

The needles and darts wouldn't stop coming. A full-fledged ballista couldn't pierce these dresses! The Imperial Guard that was on watch also had full protection. These dresses had the defensive capabilities of Legendary-class armor. No matter how dangerous it was here, I didn't *think* we'd be getting a giant ballista-wielding assassin shooting at us. That assassin would have a hard time staying undercover, for one.

"What a drag."

"They just won't stop. So annoying."

Haruka-kun was waiting for something. I doubted he'd let things end like this. For now, we needed to hold back. Once the king's authority was properly reestablished, we could go after the nobles.

If I were them, I'd aim for Haruka-kun. He was the guest of honor and had direct connections to the princess and Lady Merielle, for one. If things went well, you could find a way to both of them, on top of putting the king back in his place. Is that why those nobles kept trying to chat them up?

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"Damn, nothing works!"

"The drugs didn't either. We're almost out of spellstones!"

Just when I thought my garbage sons could be useful, it came to this.

"This is our last chance," I warned them. "Our servants have already been arrested. When this ball ends, we're done for."

They hadn't been able to speak to the girls, much less approach them. When the ladies finally passed by on their way to their seats, they completely ignored my sons, not even making eye contact. Those fools prided themselves on seduction, but that just meant using money, coercion, drugs, and skills. They had no true charm.

"One of you will need to take responsibility and die for our family," I said. "Decide amongst yourselves. There's no avenue out."

"Father…"

My only escape was to discard one of my own sons. They were twins, after all. It didn't matter which one remained.

"Psst… Let's aim for the others. Let's kill the boy, kidnap the girls—it's our only option."

"Agreed."

If a brawl broke out tonight, there would be no turning back. At the same time, if we did not succeed in our schemes, the other nobles would make light of our great house and turn on us.

If we *did* succeed, the other nobles would flock to our house. They would have no choice but to obey our every whim. No man could stand to witness such beauty and not taste it for himself.

If we did succeed, the girls might even bring the princess and the Omui girl along with them. We could ignore the black-haired clown and bring him to heel with force. The remaining problem was the king's army, which would chase us back to our territory. Ideally we would take either the princess or Omui girl as a captive. Our backs were against the wall.

Our fate was sealed whether or not we took this risk. We had to gamble and win. Would my sons' deaths be in vain, or would they achieve glory? They had only one way to survive now.

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The third-rate play had started, but how much could I charge for a third-rate play?

"In the name of the noble great houses of Diorelle, we formally indict the black-haired buffoon!"

Ugh, what a drag. At least we finally drew 'em out. Why not *before* the dance though, seriously?

"That black-haired buffoon has forced women into slavery with black magic! For the sake of their honor, we must save them. I propose a duel with this so-called commander. Though the coward is fit only to flee, he must be able to hold a sword!"

Blech, so *this* was what we were doing? I was sure they were going to try to burst in on me in the dead of night. But a *duel?* That was so medieval! I guess this world *was* literally medieval, to be fair. They also had a point. I did use a forbidden—I mean, like, mega-illegal—skill Servitude on more than a few people but…could you *really* call them slaves? I doubted that enslaved people usually went around attacking their masters with morning stars. What kind of slavery would that be?!

"Uh, who are you? Well, you don't need to answer, 'cause I'm not gonna remember. I mean, if you wanna wager on a duel, I'm down. What

do I get if I win? If you're going to indict me, then I'm pretty sure you need at least five nobles co-sponsoring the indictment. What are you doing hollering by yourself? Get some co-sponsors first, decide the conditions of the duel, and then start yelling at me. 'Kay?"

People *really* gotta get their shit together. I mean, I knew the nobles didn't intend to meekly obey the king and stop their wickedness. Even if they pulled something and wiped out the king, that'd cause a lot of damage along the way. Until I found out what they were scheming, I wouldn't know severe the situation was.

"Most honorable lord. This individual *saved* those women in their hour of need, and only endeavors to protect them in all that he does. Of course, if other nobles sponsor the indictment, then I have no basis for complaint. I leave this judgment to my honorable court."

"Our house sponsors!"

"As does ours. We'll contribute 3 million ele—no, 4 million."

"I, too…"

And blah-blah-blah. I mean, if they were gonna gamble cash, I'd gladly play along. As expected, the nobles didn't walk around with more than a couple million ele in their pockets, but the cumulative sum was already over 80 million ele and still rising. The trick in the aristocratic duel system: if you couldn't match your opponent's wager, it was an automatic loss. Which meant that if they bet enough, they'd be able to take the girls without needing to win the duel. The nobles were piling in on their golden chance. Nasty, right? Just barbaric.

"We of House Kasgill will contribute an additional 10 million ele, bringing the total to 100 million ele. That is our wager."

I glanced over at Dancer Girl to have her tie up Mr. Meridad and the fancy commander dude. The king looked like he was about to attack someone, so she tied him up too.

"If you cannot wager 100 million ele, you lose the contest. We'll have no choice but to take all the money you have in addition to the girls. Soldiers, seize them!"

The nobles had jumped the gun a little. Big bucks for me.

“Okay, 100 million ele? Here’s a bill, genuine issue? Should we bet some more?”

“*…What?”*

I mean, thank god, where else was I gonna get to use my 100 million ele bill! I thought it’d bring me a big-bucks lifestyle, but none of the stores would give me change. I still had the damn thing!

“It’s true, it’s a real bill!”

“Shit…”

Hey, they were the ones who wanted to bet 100 million ele! I matched the bet they started, and now they got all pissy? *If you hate dolla bills so much, don’t issue them?* How stupid can you get? Maybe this was like the 2,000-yen bill in Japan? Everyone hated it. Yeah, me too.

The nobles sighed and seemed to lose all their strength…then the guy just came charging at me with his sword. It was a high-speed attack with a poison-coated sword. He’d be going for a surprise attack and slash combo.

“You coward—ddrrrf!”

Mr. Meridad was losing his mind trying to charge the scene, so Dancer Girl tightened the ropes and gagged him with a handkerchief, which he was chewing on. Was it tasty or something?

I’d personally never heard of a duel that involved surprise-attacking an unarmed opponent. Much less with a poisoned blade. With all of the surprise morning-star showers I got every morning, a downright downpour of downward swinging spiked clubs, this was nothing! It was hard enough to move my back and legs in this tux. This guy had an unusual sword technique specialized for duels and finding holes in his opponent’s stance.

It wasn’t enough. I’d studied waltzing on a level beyond what the locals were capable of. He was going for my legs. Normally that would work, but common sense never seemed to pull its weight in this world. I’d already achieved some serious levels of footwork mastery in my old world. *Don’t overlook the power of Dance Dance Revolution!*

On the other hand, feats that were impossible back in my world were made possible here with skills and stats. My legs could even get a perfect

score on that impossible *PARANOiA ~HADES~* DDR song now—no sword had a dream of touching me! *This Whack-a-Mole needs some fine-tuning.*

The raging sword strikes swept in at over 300 bpm. I had to perform approximately twelve steps per second to dodge the rampaging blows. Attempting to stab my legs was beyond ridiculous, especially since I was close to attaining that God of Legs title. Speaking of ridiculous, so was my luck! I used that luck to avoid getting stuck.

At this rate of attack, I could just stomp my feet to avoid his blows. Uh-oh. Did Merimeri-san teach me this? Was stomping the noble version of DDR? *Whatevs. He can't touch me.*

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So this had been the great houses' scheme. Lure the nobles with the promise of the girls, rope the boy into a duel, and raise such a monstrous sum that they would bankrupt him into defeat. He just whipped out a 100 million ele bill in response, shocking every noble into silence. Why did they get into a monetary contest with a boy whose fortune was greater than the entire kingdom's? How exactly did nobles *within* that kingdom think they had enough to out-wager him?

No one knew what monstrous sum of wealth the dungeon-slayer, who collected the greatest treasures and fortune of the Ultimate Dungeon itself, possessed.

Then, a surprise attack. Without even obeying the manners of a duel, the challenger charged at the unarmed boy to kill. When I leapt up to try and come to his aid, one of his comrades tied me up immediately.

I supposed she was telling me there was no need to intervene. The lord thrusted his sword in a torrent of swings. The boy countered with what might be called 'footwork' at a fast beat, though it was footwork beyond any limit of dancing I had ever witnessed. No one could touch that. A great sword could never land a blow in the midst of his unpredictable ultra-speed motion.

How brutish. The lord possessed a peculiar sword technique that involved targeting the opponent's lower body—suitable for a duel and nothing else, I supposed. In a contest between unarmored swordsmen, targeting your opponent's legs would render them unable to set their stance and attack you in return. It'd be a one-sided contest. It was no use in actual combat, but it was a peerless technique in a one-on-one duel.

Yet he couldn't lay a finger on the boy. He swept in, stabbing and sweeping, but the boy remained one step ahead with his furious footwork frenzy. The lord's technique was supposed to render his opponent unable to move. Instead it just looked like a boorish display of wild swinging.

Now on the brink of exhaustion, he continued to swipe at the boy, but he had already lost force and speed. He was obviously fatigued. Tears and snot running from his face, he kept on stabbing, but his swings couldn't even touch the boy's afterimages.

The victory had already been decided, but the boy, seemingly enjoying himself, further increased the speed and intricacy of his dance steps.

The lord couldn't win, but he wouldn't withdraw. If he didn't kill the boy, he would be regarded as a violator of all the manners of a duel. He'd drawn his sword in the king's palace. Even if he were spared execution, he would have no allies left in the building.

Thus, even as the boy leapt and danced with increasing speed, the futile attacks continued. The boy played a crazed drumbeat on the ground. The relentless rhythm reverberated through my body.

No matter your level, it would be hopeless to try and imitate that footwork. His performance was so wondrous that the crowd looked ever on the verge of bursting into applause.

At last, he fell. Not the boy, who continued hopping, full of energy. He looked like he was having a fine time. But now that the first duel was over, were we about to witness a second?

"Grrrrr… That boy needs a lecture!"

"Remember, patience!"

"No lecture—look, it's a second duel!"

The boy had taken the nobles' massive wager—a crippling blow to all the nobles who'd bet against him. It was a reckless, foolish bet by men dazzled by the beauty of the black-haired maidens. Indeed, this meant their end. These were the descendants of nobles who swore to protect the people and uphold the king. But their bloodlines had grown rancid, they had forgotten their duty, and here they were.

Whatever excuses they would make, the boy simply needed to dance around to bring the duel to an end. The nobles had targeted tonight's guest of honor—there was no way for them to evade responsibility any longer. Defeat in this duel meant loss of all rank. In addition to discarding all of the customs of dueling, this lord hadn't even fought honorably.

The boy trampled the rotten lord with nothing more violent than his dance moves, and the man lost everything. The boy, who now possessed two of the few 100 million ele bills that existed in this kingdom, gazed upon them with a look of disgust. He had just received a fortune of wealth from the nobles of Diorelle. It was a prize he obviously hadn't wanted.

Even the fortune of the royal family had no chance of rivaling his. In the end, it had all been a performance from a clown—a performance with an admission fee of 100 million ele.

***

Those scheming nobles. The boy delivered them a psychological blow during the duel, and ever since, the captured servants and attendants who had been spreading poison and status ailments across the hall couldn't hold back any longer and formally confessed to their crimes.

They wept. They listed all the black-haired boy's sins, but all he'd done was dance. It was impossible to accuse him of anything—he hadn't so much as drawn his blade. While he may not have sinned, winning a sum of 100 million ele from the nobility was sure to stir up some anger.

"I went to make some mega big bucks and I ended up with the fantasy equivalent of two 2,000-yen bills. Useless cash! Bills that can't fulfill the most basic function of a bill. Not even usable as blindfolds for Blindfold Rep to use on me! They'd just be scratchy!"

A long-standing noble house of Diorelle had fallen. Its name and history would crumble and vanish on the wind. Launching an illegal duel in pursuit of women, costing the nobility rank and wealth… The boy had invited them to dance, and they'd danced to their own destruction.

The nobles' self-destruction consolidated power to the king. The gambled money could fill the coffers of the kingdom.

"Meropapa, is this a dream? The tragedies of Diorelle have vanished with a dance. I don't understand."

My friend was tied up and bound with rope beside me, but I didn't know who else to ask.

"Now I understand why you sent word that 'our problems were solved but we don't know why.' I am in the same predicament now. I don't know why either."

The letter had been completely incomprehensible, but it turned out to be perfectly accurate. Any true description of the incomprehensible circumstances was bound to be incomprehensible itself.

Terisel, tied up beside Meropapa, smiled. We witnessed an amusing performance. All the wise men and women in this kingdom would be smiling today.

"For tonight's performance, you have all witnessed buffoonery on the dance floor. This may be a performance whose plot defies our understanding, but I sense this is the true ending to the play that has been so popular of late. You all saw that play, and you decided to target the black-haired clown. You didn't realize that the clown was the author of that very play. You were puppets to his whims.

"Without realizing that you were merely reading the lines he'd written for you, you challenged him. A clown capable of killing dungeon kings. Comedic, no? Now the whole city is laughing at *you*, my friends."

They had all pointed and laughed at him. This wasn't a clown to be laughed at. He was a trickster, and laughter was *his* weapon to wield. The whole city had moved according to his purpose. We were the fools…myself included.

The boy played with every noble in this building, luring them to use their plots and schemes against him. They'd played right into his hands. By the time they realized the magician's trick, the show was over. *And now, my friends, it's time for the curtain call.*

DAY 77

LATE NIGHT

I wanted to rip off the orphans too, so I gave 'em some pocket change. Now my classmates are trying to get in on the deal!

DIORELLE CAPITAL

NOBLE QUARTER

WE DEPARTED THE PALACE, passed through the noble quarter, and went straight through the gates of the slum quarter. Great celebrations awaited us there and all that.

"They were waiting and stuff, so we left, but we're staying at the castle tonight, ya know? The orphans are sleeping there, so we're not heading home."

The *rerorero*-licky-licky old dude and the nerd brigade were still there to torch anyone with any vile, virulent, violent thoughts of laying a hand on the orphans. Torching that kinda scum to dust would be such magnificent scenery that even Heidi would start yodeling haikus.

"Since we came all the way out here, are we sure there aren't any sexy female knights waiting for me? I'm happy to get captured for an extremely thorough cross-examination. It'll probably be more pleasant than the so-called 'training' I go through anyhow. I'll just get myself examined by some babes real quick. No matter what they ask, I'll answer with my mouth, lips, and tongue. This is a one-time offer, folks, so don't delay! I mean, I'm not asking for too much. Just a sexy torturer babe. Whenever I ask anyone to go easy on me, that's the last thing that I get. Being hard is definitely better than being easy, so we can just open the door on this new kink to explore, ya know with the—"

"Shuuuuuuut *up*! You do realize how creepy you're being right now?!"

The girls ruined my carefully constructed speech. I thought I was finally getting my chance to shine… I suppose it wasn't right to open doors

that were better left shut in front of high school girls. Miss Armor Rep with a whip was a lot more dangerous than any torturer babe could ever be.

In the most predictable development of all time, we went strolling around the noble quarter only to find the streets teeming with endless obnoxious old dudes. *They never stop spawning!*

"Pretty strange they've been waiting all night. The least they could've done was prepare some pretty old dudes for us… Er, wait, ew! No thanks."

These dudes were some nasty losers. The moment they saw a kid in a tuxedo and a bunch of unarmed girls in dresses, they surrounded and attacked us. They were aiming to either kidnap or kill! Not that they had a chance. We were already knocking them out.

"Keep your distance!"

"Leave it to me!"

"Release your stress!"

"I could hardly hold in my urge to diss Haruka-kun all night!"

"Chaaaarge!!!"

I didn't know if they gave up on their kidnapping plan or what, but they started to fire arrows and spells at us from a distance. There was nothing strong enough to hurt us, though. The girls were going all out. *They're trying to kidnap the orphans, so now I'm pissed!* The girls had been getting Hypnosis and Seduction shot at them all night, so they were *mega* pissed. If they hated it that much, why didn't they just let me release Servitude?

The ball had made the resurrection of the royal family clear for all to see. The nobles had the choice to either get crushed or surrender peacefully. Right now, they were choosing the crush option, so there were armed militias currently getting smashed by girls in gorgeous gowns. Their defenses were so strong they didn't even need to dodge any attacks. The swords, spears, and arrows all bounced off their dresses. The dresses even sucked up all the magic that came their way to provide MP replenishment.

"Those dudes couldn't even beat upper dungeon levels in equipment like that, but these dresses are built for sweeping the mid-floors," I said.

“Plus the skills on their equipment are blech. Throw in the level difference, and I don’t think they ever had a chance?”

This was the dresses’ first time in combat. I think these could’ve carried the girls through the Sphinx and the mummies! At this point, they were just standing still and letting the attacks bounce off them because it was funny.

Understandably, the old dudes were starting to get hesitant about attacking these invincible dresses. Dancer Girl sealed off all escape routes with her chains. We were in the noble quarter. I wouldn’t mind if we destroyed it to make way for a little remodeling. In fact, the girls started to knock down the ugly buildings themselves.

“The girls haven’t even taken their swords out yet. They’re insulting them,” I commented. “I mean, I’d want to run after seeing morning stars whip out of those dresses. No specific reason, of course!”

The dresses swayed, leaving pure-white afterimages—and the old dudes went flying. They didn’t stand a chance. How did they think they were going to capture those orphans? With just a few thousand high-level mercenaries? Sheesh. The noble quarter was already half-ruined; the girls chased the soldiers towards unscathed buildings purely for the excuse knock them down.

“Wh-why can’t my sword cut through a dress?! Aaaaagh!”

Uh, because those dresses are equipped with physical and slashing resistances? Yup, I wove the effects into the fabric, layering magic in to create dresses sturdier than heavy armor.

“Our arrows aren’t doing anything! What in the world are those dresses?! The arrows just bounce off of them—gwagh!”

I used iron thread powered up with mithril. Arrows weren’t gonna pierce them, duh! Those dresses required a minimum level of 100 to break through their resistances, for heaven’s sake! They were heavy!

“Retreat to the estate, re—wait, the estate! It’s—urrrck!”

I was waiting for a good opportunity to bulldoze the noble quarter, and these guys gave it to me. I mean look, they attacked us first. It was totally a fair, honest fight. I swear!

Even after they spent the whole night sending assassins and trying to afflict us with status ailments, their blades and magic stood no chance. So why did they keep attacking? Old dudes never learned from their mistakes.

"They spent so much effort preparing assassination traps and surprise attacks…but instead they're getting a mouthful of white cloth and bloody morning star, I guess regular armor could've done the job? Hey, why are you girls averting your eyes?"

At least they didn't have any excuses anymore. This should be the finishing blow on the defeated nobles. They'd have no choice but to give in and listen to whatever the king said from now on. Still, those girls were going a little overboard.

They'd already taken out half of the enemy force, but you'd find no mercy from those maidens. We just wanted to get back to the frontier. the girls needed a chance to let loose after going so long without a dungeon raid. They were also probably short on cash. *Do they know that old dudes don't turn into spellstones?*

Even though the girls could've wiped them out in an instant, they took their time, slowly closing in, letting all the attacks bounce off them, and destroying one mansion after the next. They destroyed the nobles' mental fortitude and architectural integrity, all at once.

The soldiers might've been after the orphans as hostages, but even if they got past us, we had quite the force assembled between Slimey, the cherry-stem-twistin' old dude, and the nerdbrains. Princess Girl, Maid Girl, and Merimeri-san ended up joining us, but they were just extra.

Even Elf Girl was damn strong. I had been in a fantasy world for a while, so why did it feel like this was my first time witnessing an actual, proper mage? She was doing something different than Magic Entanglement, but it looked pretty similar to my eyes. She activated a surge of Wind magic around herself and used it to send the old dudes flying.

"She makes it look easy! Why do Lascivious and Sex God always make things harder for me?"

I had no regrets about any of this though. The only people getting injured here were old dudes, and that was no concern of mine. Injured or not, I'd burn 'em until they lost every last hair. The old dudes charged in

my direction to capture me and take me hostage, but the girls formed a wall around me. I ended up kinda standing in the center of them all, doing nothing. *This must be Loner's fault! Ugh, I'm so bored.*

I guess all the dancing wore me out, so resting here wasn't so bad. After all, I got beat up pretty badly keeping up with Dancer Girl. I'd needed to observe her dancing with Jupiter Eye, record and analyze her moves with Wisdom, and then automatically control my own movements with Blockhead. My body was tearing itself to shreds the whole time we danced together. *Her dancing is totally out of control!*

With nothing better to do, I sneakily demolished the remaining noble residences, picking up everything of monetary value that fell out.

"Didn't expect to have to do so much bending over tonight. What a pain," I said. "Ooh, there's some treasure!"

There were a few tough soldiers mixed up in the crowd, but I had a bigger problem on my hands. Look, we all know that high-level assassins and swordsmen don't stand a chance against Dungeon Emperors, right? They should really leave the Dungeon Emperors alone. Those two could easily wipe out everyone by themselves, but they seemed to be having a blast fighting with the girls. They knew how fun it was to work together because each of them had spent an eternity in solitude. They bonked the old dudes left and right, knocked over the buildings, laughing and smiling… They were having a good time, and I decided to ignore the sense of déjà vu that was creeping up on me.

"Okay, that's everything. What now?"

"The nobles still have territory outside of the capital, don't they?"

The old dudes had all gotten knocked out. Of course, that was the only thing old dudes were good for, so all was right in the world. Seeing so many old dudes crowded together like this hurt my eyes, but it wouldn't be so bad after I burned their hair off.

The nobles had lost their court rank and their estates. I'd picked their fortunes out of the rubble too, so now they were penniless. It wasn't too different from what they did to the orphans, so they had no right to complain. Problem was, if they escaped to their domains, more resources

were waiting for them back there. I could follow them and pick up their stuff off the ground there too, but that'd be *work.*

"Couldn't they just let their fortunes fall on the ground a little more conveniently? Come on, stupid old dudes, read the room."

"What social cue would they be following to bring all their resources to the capital, exactly?!"

Well, at least they couldn't escape now.

"Everyone was in attendance at the ball today, so we've got all the dukes and their families tied up in rope. Sounds to me like a job for S&M Rep and her tortoise shell—gggrmmmffaaackyack! Stop! Dual-wielding morning stars?! What a fresh, furious, decapitating danger swinging in my direction! I'm super sorry! I forgot! As in I forgot *not* to say that I imagined some thick curves cradled by cat's cradle-level bondage, none of which I visualized vividly, so please don't whip me? See, I've forgotten it so much that I can't even remember your name! It's all good! Right?"

Now everyone was glaring at me. *Fine with me, so long as it's just glares!*

"Now the second-division commander of the royal army is here. Let's go back."

"The orphans are sleeping there already. It's a sleepover at the palace tonight."

"For real, if we're loud and wake the orphans, they'll start running around the halls with the meatheads. That'll earn them a lecture from Class Rep! Don't wanna open the door and expose them to too many *new things*."

"Keep *your* door closed!!!" the girls shouted. "You're making it sound like the *lectures* are what threatens their innocence!"

S&M Rep's combat style was putting her in a tough spot, apparently. Man, she really had mastered wielding both the morning star and her whips. I guess I wouldn't get to see Class Rep in tortoise shell bondage. It was unfortunate, but she had already whipped out her Thunderbolt Chain Whip. I decided to shut up for the time being. *That thing is nuts.*

Still, nothing was fun about seeing old dudes tied up and rolling around on the ground. It was only natural that S&M Rep tied up in tortoise

shell bondage would be higher on the list of a teenage boy's priorities, right? Something would have to be wrong for his heart to flutter at the sight of macho old dudes doing some bondage wrestling in the dirt with their heads on fire.

The cherry-stem-twistin' old dude and the nerd brigade had probably taken out the nobles that were trying to escape to their own territory by now. With their skills, there was no way they would lose in a confined space. They were defending the orphans with their invincible cheat skills. *The battle is definitely over already.*

Which meant the orphans were probably sleeping tight, unaware anything was up. All of the mean grown-ups were gone now. The nightmare was over for them. We raked in some pretty healthy apology fees while we were busy ending it.

When the orphans woke up in the morning, they would have a fun day ahead of them. We ripped off the nobles more than enough to give them a cut, so I planned to give them plenty of allowance. *I can't wait to see their smiles.*

DAY 77

LATE NIGHT

I double-checked to be sure, but my sex appeal isn't listed in the treasure inventory.

DIORELLE CAPITAL

ROYAL PALACE

THE NOBLES HAD been cut down to two-thirds of their former numbers. The remaining lords had already lost most of their strength; what few resources they had left derived from branch families. Anyone who took part in that little rebellion was formally and permanently banned from the ranks of the nobility. We could use more titled nobles now, but I knew the boy and his friends would refuse if asked.

The boy wanted no reward despite shouldering the weight of the kingdom. He only wanted what was known as "sex appeal," something that would prevent people from getting mad at him even when he didn't do anything wrong. He had allegedly looked for it in the Diorelle treasure inventory to no avail. I'd be surprised if he had found it.

At the very least we could thank him in the form of letting him take whatever he wanted to sneak out of the treasury. Nothing we had there could possibly repay him.

"Meropapa, we don't have enough nobles. This will disrupt our governing. Is there anyone we can award a noble rank? Someone from the frontier will do."

"I must decline. The nobility is not popular in the frontier. In our impoverished land, nobles are known as 'dangerous' and 'uptight' and 'easy targets for bullying.' I do not believe I will find anyone willing."

Unpopular? How could that be? Obviously it was one thing to be envious of the nobility who fought for and protected the people in all of their endeavors. But to despise them… What was going on in Omui?

I suppose I shouldn't be too surprised. It was the frontier, after all. Our kingdom had been guilty of many crimes. The frontier had faced the horrific monsters on the edge of the world, alone. The Omui family had fought in vain against creeping death for untold generations. For that reason, while they longed for the glamor of royals, no one desired to become nobility. *Targets for bullying, though…*

"I have a report. We got them. That concludes the report."

"No, it doesn't! Are the boy and his friends safe? I know they are, but tell me!"

A messenger came from Terisel. The boys' group acted as decoys to lure out the remaining ill-intentioned lords. They would likely make one last attempt to carry off the warrior maidens: a foolish endeavor that would spell their doom.

A letter from the frontier held the answers I was seeking. *Why would the nobles of a kingdom nearly destroyed by dungeons pick a fight with the people destroying those dungeons? If you seek suicide, don't bother to come here. Just die where you stand. Signed, Omui.* The letter that broke off negotiations between kingdom and frontier. The sender himself currently occupied the massage chair next to me.

We had our answer. The nobles fell prey to the beauty of the maidens and their own decay and greed. For them to try to defeat the army that destroyed the greatest threats this continent had ever known… If they were capable of it, they should have taken on the dungeons themselves. They were lured in by the beauty of the girls and the 200 million ele bills. Temptation had blinded them.

Once they attacked the king's guest of honor, they had no more excuses. Destroying their houses was fair and legal. The boy had managed to pin them into submission. Everything was a trap, and the boy himself was the bait.

"It's all over."

"Yes."

We had arrived at the end of history. Once, our nobility stood for the people. Now less than a third of our numbers remained—and with it, less than a third of that former resolve. The kingdom may have failed to stand

up to its heroic beginnings, but those of the kingdom that did remain still had the duty to continue on its legacy.

"Meropapa, I must ask… What should I do?"

I could not rule with just a third of the nobility. If I spared the defeated nobles, this was all for nothing. I could not let all that we'd salvaged go to waste.

"What to do? I'm sure you can figure it out, Your Majesty. And if you can't, well, there's nothing to be done. It's not up to you anymore."

"I can't sit here and take no action at all. I can't give up after all that boy has done for us."

The nobility and bureaucrats had secret accounts, so we didn't know their exact worth. They also falsified their records. It would be impossible to take an accurate accounting. Just how long would it take to rebuild an accurate ledger from scratch? I simply lacked the information to reign. Even if it were to remain incomplete during my lifetime, I couldn't give up. All I could do was advance one step at a time, no matter how slowly.

Meanwhile, chaos in the kingdom only made the people suffer. The confusion would ripple out into the regional domains. There was no escaping the fact that the nobles away from the capital would still need to be dealt with. Pursuing that would only make life more difficult for the commoners there.

Clunk. "You're saying you can't do it, King Dialleces. You're right. Nor could I."

With that, he tossed a heavy tome in my direction. I opened it. The full title was *So…Pimpin' Kingdom. Well, I dunno what it's called, but here's an administration strategy and manual for your kingdom and stuff. Ya feel?* As for the contents… It contained information about the realm in perfect detail. Unaltered tax and crop harvest numbers, accurate population figures for towns and villages. Everything was gathered in one place.

It would have been impossible for us to get our hands on this much true information no matter how hard we tried. Yet here it was. If…if this was all true, then the nobles kept over half of the tax revenue for themselves, charging the people multiples of what they were supposed to. A rot that had proceeded for dozens—no, hundreds of years. A fatal

corruption. The kingdom had been on borrowed time for this long. No wonder it came to this.

"And this…"

"Yes. From the boy."

Everything we thought we knew had been false all along. It made perfect sense that our countermeasures hadn't worked. Just how many villages and towns had iron mines we didn't know about? Our own bureaucrats had to have conspired on this level of rot.

There was a second volume called *How to rip people off? Not rip farts, though? Probs?* It contained a list of secret accounts. It explained in precise detail who committed what fraud and for what purpose. They had accomplices. Regional bureaucrats embezzled and reported the numbers to the duke, who then in turn embezzled and reported to the kingdom. Then, our own bureaucrats took their cut and gave what remained to the treasury.

What rank corruption. Two-thirds of the bureaucrats would have to be dealt with.

We needed to remake the whole government. With this book, maybe it was possible. We didn't need to conduct an investigation, and the property structures were all described in the books. All that was required was to make up for the loss in labor. The books listed step by step what we should do and how to do it, with solutions to every possible problem. This book rendered regional lords—not to mention bureaucrats—as mere ornaments. They could just do what we told them. Obey, and understand the book. For the sake of our realm, its rulers needed to learn its lessons by heart.

Once again, the kingdom was saved. We had a book that contained all of the information we needed—it must have been prepared far in advance. The kingdom would die and be reborn. It was fate.

How much time and effort had it taken to investigate such a massive volume of information, then run all the necessary calculations and analyses to make sense of it? With the resources at our disposal, it would have taken years, optimistically. The books even told us what to do about future problems—they were manuals for the kingdom's future.

“So this is the power that remade the frontier,” I said. “He’s given us…everything.”

“It was the same in the frontier. Our edition was even more detailed than this. Accept it.”

What unbelievable power! Meropapa explained that it had precise measures for industry, agriculture, and government administration; it included schedules, budgets, and even blueprints for everything from iron mine development to new agricultural products to city planning, water treatment, and safety and defense. Now I understood how the frontier had changed—you could build a nation with these manuals. When the kingdom abandoned the frontier, the frontier had been reborn and the kingdom died.

“A report, Your Majesty. The nobility’s militias have all been captured and taken into custody. All titles have been stripped and fortunes confiscated for the guilty parties. Their properties have been flattened into vacant lots. That concludes the report.”

They had won, then. Even if I decided to spare the convicted nobles’ lives, they’d already lost their titles and their fortunes. Just like the orphans.

Was this his fury on behalf of those orphans? The kingdom, the nobles—were they all collateral damage in his scheme for revenge? Perhaps the books he’d given us was for their sake, not ours. Maybe he wanted a kingdom for the people— a future for them.

We couldn’t save the orphans before. Now, the boy had entrusted us with their futures. We would not fail. The boy had entrusted us with something truly worth saving.

DAY 78

MORNING

A trim and ladylike exit doesn't necessarily remain that way.

DIORELLE CAPITAL

CAPITAL

AFTER GETTING BACK to our guest room, I faced a never-ending lecture. Yeah, the girls were high-key pissed? I didn't do anything wrong, so the source of their anger was incomprehensible, but supposedly it was because I'd written that play script. They didn't like being bikini Amazons, huh?

But I made money. I mean, I was cashing out nonstop on the long-running, bestselling mega-hit show we were putting on. Think about this: there were no bras in this world, so the people here never developed a resistance to them. They were irresistible! That aside, the plays here had crappy production. All they did was stand around and recite the lines. They didn't even move, so they were super boring.

Shows here had a long way to go before they even reached medieval levels. In those performances, they just recited the dialogue. Plus we sold scripts at the show, so we double-dipped on profit.

Yep, they sold like crazy. Everyone here was starved for amusement and for information. In the midst of fear and anxiety about the war, of course people would buy stories about war heroes. Which meant that familiar, popular figures served best as the heroes for the show, and the frontier and Princess Girl were as popular as they got. For some reason, even the pimpin' king was pretty popular. They could be the main characters. If I'd written it as a standard fantasy, that'd be all there was to it. Boring!

Coming up with antagonists was easy—the other countries and the nobles—but I couldn't have a play where the protagonists and antagonists

never even met. A play where everything happens with words just didn't have any excitement, so people couldn't get into it.

For the exciting point of contact, I could use the king's old brother dude. He wasn't popular. I had to flip him on his head, and make his stupid struggles hale and hearty heroism. That had shock value. Nothing gets people excited like inverting expectations. Last but not least I needed a fool, and of course some sex appeal. *Definitely could use some of that!*

What's an epic without a fool, and a teenage boy's life without eroticism? I wanted some wardrobe malfunctions as well, and the bikinis were a huge hit with the actresses. They rejected my wardrobe malfunction idea, though… Well, can't win 'em all. Plus they would've gone *ham* on my ass with an execution-level lecture. Good thing I held off, then! *If only.*

We had a hit on our hands! So why were they so mad at me? Was it my I ❤ FRONTIER bikini idea?

I needed to appeal to the capital's citizens, and eroticism attracts customers. It induces reactions in teenage boys and seduces sales, so the souvenir shop profits were up. I mean, the real-life girls the show was based on worked in the souvenir shop, so the line was out the door the next morning.

A heroic tale with familiar heroes cured the people of their anxiety around the king's illness. A play that had laughter, plot twists, and sex appeal was a guaranteed hit. In fact, people came to see it over and over again. Repeated viewings brought them genuine peace and happiness, and that delivered their cash straight to my pockets. Ahh, the power of bikinis! Princess Girl and Merimeri-san were heroes, and the king was resurrected. It brought tears of joy to the eyes of the viewers, and cash to my coffers.

Art, especially theater, has been used to manipulate public opinion since ancient times, with royalty and nobility exerting their influence via patronage. The nobles that didn't fight against us in the war had gained an overwhelming advantage, and the nobles that followed the bad guys, the Theocracy and the Merchant Kingdom—yeah, they had been dealt with. It was the oldest tale there was: good defeating evil.

We had rounded up the corrupt nobility and stripped them of their rank and offices. Now that they had lost their ranks and their fortunes, well, they may as well die. The king decided to take their young children into the

royal family to give them a chance, but I doubted any of the families could come back from this. They were done for the moment they looked down on the slum quarter without lending them a hand.

Meanwhile, I had to deal with this endless lecture—which suddenly came to a halt. What a crazy breakfast meeting! The only outfits the girls had with them were their evening gowns…which meant more side jobs for me!

Yup, we ended up staying here overnight, so we had our breakfast meeting in the palace. That meant I had to hustle and bustle to make afternoon dresses for *everyone*, which for some reason mandated matching underwear and stockings…which meant a sudden late-night side job causing twenty-five girls to lose their minds in a sea of moaning, throbbing, groaning, and toppling, and also forking over nifty, wonderful piles of cash. Obviously.

I could use Void magic for soundproofing as the sexy moans wouldn't exactly aid the development of the orphans sleeping in the neighboring room. We especially needed to quarantine them from the natural teenage-boy response to such sounds!

All of that led to a proliferation of chores, like putting clothes on the collapsed girls, moving them into beds, and then the teenage-boy task of getting busy with Miss Armor Rep and Dancer Girl. I didn't even have time to sleep myself. Teenage boys were supposed to sleep nonstop, but I'd barely been able to catch a wink lately.

The girls gathered in their new dresses the next morning within the bright, sunlit castle—a far cry from their immodest display of the previous evening, today they appeared refined and ladylike as can be. They had washed their drool and tear-stained faces and showed up fresh and dewy.

"Good morning!"

"Oh yeah, what did Duke Omui want yesterday?"

"He wanted a development plan for the kingdom, so I gave him one."

When I was doing my stocking in the castle before, I spotted some books lying around so I filched 'em. They included piles and piles of accounts—some public, some secret. I was just trying to find something good to read, but there wasn't even anything juicy in there.

I used Jupiter Eye to read ’em and Wisdom to record the information. Writing the development plan was easy from there—Magic Hands took care of that in three minutes. The whole plan was to do what was necessary and skip what wasn’t. The nobles and public officials were just overcomplicating stuff with their scamming before. Now that I knew what they were doing behind the scenes, we just had to course-correct. I snuck in that they absolutely had to install a hundred massage chairs in the castle, so riches would be coming my way!

I found proof of money embezzled from construction projects and profits from secret iron mines and the like. The bureaucrats were great at their jobs—just corrupt beyond belief. That was how they’d managed to fool the capital in their accounting so thoroughly—all of the reports they sent had been consistent. They managed to send perfectly falsified reports only because they kept up such a thorough fraud. It was almost admirable. Thanks to their efforts, those documents were enough to make sense of things. I mean, for documenting a completely corrupt kingdom, they did an incredible job. All they lacked were morals. But yeah, that’s why I was up working all night.

“Good morning, everyone. Breakfast has been prepared. Please follow me to the dining hall.”

Dang, I was hoping for a maid, but it’s another old dude. The orphans playfully went along with the group of girls in their simple dresses of various colors. And the dudes, who had to wear the morning coats I whipped together for them, set out for the dining hall looking grumpy as can be. The girls had rejected their proposal to go back to the souvenir shop to have breakfast. Everyone was pretty disappointed because the food back at the shop was better.

“Morning, Haruka-kun. I’m sorry about what happened last night.”

“Haruka-kun! Please, I want one of those massage thrones in my palace, in the audience hall!”

“Sir Haruka, I must invite you to my residence some time as thanks for the restoration mushroom you provided…”

Old dudes swarming me first thing in the morning! Meanwhile, the girls were talking with the noble ladies and girls. Even the nerdarinos got to chat up some buff chicks from the first royal division. All I had were old

dudes! I took a look at the noble women—note to self: curling irons would be a surefire bestseller.

Three of the young princes were also in attendance, but I didn't want anything to do with princes or old dudes. Somehow, even old commoner dudes who I'd given some souvenir shop freebies to had showed up! I needed to defeat this old-dude dungeon!

"Your Majesty. Everyone has arrived."

Just when I thought it was breakfast time, it was boring speech time. Mr. Meridad didn't seem to be interested in it either. He completely ignored the pimpin' king and prattled on about how he wanted a massage chair in his own throne room. The pimpin' king then stood up on the podium and greeted everyone. This was first declaration on the dawn of a new kingdom:

"First of all, I'd like to give a toast. *Let's get liiiiiiit!!!*"

"*He is the party king!"*

I knew it. *This kingdom is done for.*

"Haruka-kun, when did you teach him to say that?!"

The king talked. I just wanted to go check out the noble girls, but I was trapped in a hell of old dudes. My classmates got mad at me and when I tried to escape them the orphans flew at me as always. It was pure chaos! I could've used a more quiet and proper genteel breakfast, to be honest. Oh, and a twenty-second morning battle, perhaps?

After the chaotic breakfast meeting, everyone went straight to work doing what they needed to rebuild the kingdom. I knew the government was in a tight spot. They were short on manpower and needed to completely rebuild.

Still, getting rid of the 66 percent of the nobility who'd interfered with governance was a start. With the correct governing structure in place, improvements should bear fruit quickly. At last, we had a nation. They could deal with their own problems now.

It was time to go home. First to the souvenir shop to make some arrangements, and then back to the frontier. We were wasting our money holding those rooms, after all. *And how am I gonna pay my board?*

DAY 78

NOON

These are gonna fly off the shelves if we label 'em freshly used teenage-girl armor.

DIORELLE CAPITAL

ROYAL PALACE

AS YOU MIGHT EXPECT, the palace's treasure hall was spacious and full of stuff. They didn't label this picking-up sesh as an official award from the king, but I was definitely gonna end up with whatever I wanted. Equipment was a lot more useful than honor or medals, after all. I didn't know what to expect, but trust me, I was gonna profit from this.

You needed the king's seal to open the treasure hall, and supposedly the monkey prince wasn't involved with any of the embezzling. I'd waltzed on in with my Magic Key, but I was so busy stocking last time I was here I just skipped it.

I had low expectations, for one. The chancellor and Princess Girl didn't have particularly good weapons or armor before I got to 'em. The king said I could have what I wanted, but I figured I'd be pretty lucky if I found anything worth keeping. Unfortunately, they'd already confirmed that my sex appeal was not, in fact, in storage here.

I went around using Appraisal. The equipment was low-grade, as I'd suspected. There were a few good things here and there, but even so? Meh. They did have some good-but-gaudy stuff hung up on the walls, like "Whirlwind Spear: Power, Speed +20%. Whirlwind. Wind-type attribute (medium)." That was the strongest item they had. Supposedly a national treasure. Tough call.

Rather than the high-level stuff, I decided to look for uncommon skills. Still, even rare ones like Fall Stopper, Adhesion Weakener, and Anti-Inorganic felt pretty *meh*. There was a ton of stuff in there, but even narrowing it down, all the top candidates had some major flaw. The safest

bets would be Vitality or Intelligence-boosting equipment. Given the size of the treasure hall, I really hoped to find something rare.

"This 'Elf Magic Bow: [Elf only] Power, Speed, Dexterity, Intelligence +20%' here… Magic arrows would be nice for Elf Girl, but I could make her something with better effects that's isn't elf-exclusive. What's the point?"

I knew that the best possible outcome would be one of the cheat items that could hold seven other items within. Even after looking everywhere, I only found three with those capabilities. Even those could only boost by 10 or 30 percent, so I couldn't make much use of them. Three 100 percent-boosting items would be amazing, and I could live with 80 or 90 percent, but I couldn't find any.

"Making an item that can hold others would give our class a major power-level bump. But compound items for thirty freaking people? That'd result in a Re: Endless eternity of side jobs well into my distant twilight years… Please let there be something good in here?"

Jiggle jiggle.

Combining high-grade equipment into a compound item created something worthy of a warrior. Sure, if it was too strong you couldn't control it, but I only made it this far thanks to my Tree Branch. Former Tree Branch. It'd become a completely ridiculous, uncontrollable Universe Staff!

Throw in the mithril power-ups and Dimension Blade, Dimension Slash, and all of its special effects, and you really couldn't find fault with special equipment like that. An enemy with Dimension Slash and God's Sword would be no joke.

"I could probably find better stuff dungeon raiding in the frontier," I sighed. "Isn't there some lovely item that can set my heart aflutter? Like Lecture Repellant or Sex-Appeal Booster? Ooh, 'Intelligence Crown: [Fits three items.] Intelligence, Resistance +30%. Control boost (large). Sorcery boost (large).' Now that's a great find! I guess I'll try this…er, headband thingy on?"

Wiggle wiggle.

Seems good to me, I thought. This was good enough that I ought to give it to one of the girls, but I really needed the Control boost. I needed to

do everything I could to improve my ability to handle Magic Entanglement. If I powered it up with mithril, the boost would get even stronger. Those boosts would extend to the stat-ups and the sorcery component as well. I suspected that this item could really improve my ability to control my skills.

Plus you could combine three other items into it. It was the best find so far.

"Can my other headgear fit inside? Maybe my black cap?"

Layering up worked just fine too. The girls layered up their bracelets and anklets for style, even in dungeons. I didn't know why. The only company we had were monsters, and we couldn't see the jewelry in the first place because of their armor? There shouldn't be any problem in layering a headband and a beanie. It was kind of embarrassing for a guy to wear a headband, ya know?

I could use a helmet with this too. Stacked with other items, this item really might help with my Vitality deficiency.

The pimpin' king was jabbering on about how he could give me all of it and it still wouldn't be enough, but he needed a few items to give in case of future awards of honor, so he asked me if I could keep it to about ten artifacts. I had to make a careful selection. Throw in the orphans and their needs, and that was a lot of people to worry about. There was no shortage of people who needed stuff.

"Well, it doesn't seem like a great reason to choose it, but it'll help with our equipment shortage now. I can sell it when I get my hands on some better gear, I guess? Slimey, you want anything? Tell me before you eat it, 'cause once you eat something I can't use Appraisal on it."

Jiggle jiggle.

Looked like Slimey wanted the "Reflection Mirror: Reflection absorption (ultra)." *But he doesn't reflect, he just…eats?* Oh, maybe he was after the absorption part?

After that, I scrounged together some low-grade junk I'd auction off after I'd powered it up with mithril. Everyone was short on cash now, so I would rip my classmates off later. We needed to get back to the frontier so they could make money.

I already bought up everything I could in the capital. The pimpin' king and the other nobles were poor now, so I lent them the two useless 100 million ele bills I had. The massive fortune we confiscated from the other nobles was only pocket change. Big bucks were a longer game.

In other news, I was starting to get interested in an item I previously thought I had to seal away: "Poisonous Glove: Vitality, Dexterity +20%. Status Ailment-inflicting. Resistance-nullifying. Crazy Hand." The ability to nullify resistances was too dangerous in the wrong hands. Proportional to your level and equipment, the status ailments would overpower any resistances to them that you had. The fact that something like this even existed necessitated more equipment with the Autoheal skill.

Inflicting a good piece of equipment with poison felt risky. Even so, running some tests and analysis with Wisdom showed that it might be surprisingly useful. I could just limit its effects.

Basically, by setting its inflicted ailments to poison alone, I could make it only inflict that one status ailment. I could even set everything to *off* and not inflict anything at all. Being able to choose ailments was great. It included Hypnosis and Intoxicate and Paralysis and KO—oh yeah and sex-appeal destruction was automatically programmed into it, so I wanted to seal that away first. Where are you, Appeal-Booster?! After trying it out, I decided I'd power it up with mithril for sure. The only thing it *didn't* do was raise my sex appeal!

The rest of the items were simple Vitality- and Intelligence-strengthening gear, but anything would do for that. I was in a bit of a gear-shortage emergency, so I needed quantity over quality. Anything extra, I could power up and sell to my classmates.

I supposed it was too soon to give the orphans anything besides some emergency items. The top priority for them was eating, laughing, and being happy. We could protect them so long as they were at the orphanage. Once they grew up and wanted to go out on their own, I could make equipment for them individually. For now, a life of play was plenty.

They already had the strongest possible safety gear possible for a bunch of kids. I kinda overdid it by accident, but safety first, ya know?

I ended up grabbing over a hundred items, which made the treasure hall look kinda pathetically empty. I decided to leave behind some mass-

produced swords and bows for them. None of the weapons had any special effects, but their basic properties were top-notch, and way better overall than what they replaced. *I'm sure the pimpin' king won't mind.* I had been constantly replacing my classmates' equipment, so I had a lot of extra.

The kingdom probably needed a ton of accessories and bonus items besides armor. Their basic weapons and equipment were so shoddy. I addressed their needs and left 'em handmade gear. In fact, I was leaving them with more stuff than when they started. I wasn't the bad guy here by any means! A lot of what I left behind was used gear from the girls, so that should give them an extra special appeal. It would be mildly terrifying for some old guy to enjoy that, so I made sure to wash the hell out of everything. *Still, I'll advertise them as freshly worn?*

"All right, that's enough. I nabbed all the notable stuff already. Everyone's probably ready to head back to the frontier now, yeah? Just finished the carriage renovations too. I think this'll do?"

Boink boink!

When I handed over the list of the items I took and what I'd replaced them with, he kinda froze in place. He didn't complain though, so I hightailed it outta there. Maybe I shouldn't have taken 300 things?

"Er, well, you told me to take what I wanted, and I kinda wanted all this? It would've been too hard to narrow down the candidates seriously, so I just went with the top 300. Plus I put in 1,000 items to replace what I took, so your treasure hall actually has *more* items than before? Pretty good deal, wouldn't you say, hey?"

I had to run a check on all of the equipment, and a lot of it needed to be upgraded with mithril, so it made sense to get out of there before I did anything else. Preparations were complete and the carriages were waiting, so I went over to meet up with Class Rep to bounce on out of here. All the royals waved goodbye. Didn't Princess Girl say she was going to come to the frontier right after us? Now that the military dispatch system had been reorganized, it looked like Princess Girl would be leading one of the forces. Meanwhile, the pimpin' king was seeing us off with three of his wives! *That pimping bastard. I'll burn his head next time!*

The cherry-stem-twistin' old dude also waved at us. He came to send off Elf Girl, since she decided to come to the frontier with us. The girls and

the orphans didn't want to part ways—I mean, I think they'd get over it with enough time, but by majority vote, the class decided it would be better to stick together. Per usual, I questioned why I wasn't invited to participate in the democratic process, and why Slimey got way more votes than everyone else. Did Slimey's duplicates all get votes too?! Were they his property?!

The buff chicks from the first royal division also came—wait a second! Sexy buff chicks? I heard that the meatheads befriended them after doing some mock battles together. They were hot and the daughters of some of the great houses, but at the same time crazy ripped…six feet tall…yeah, definitely meatheads themselves.

Meanwhile, the nerds stared longingly at their letters that recently arrived from the Beast Kingdom. Some of them were official letters of gratitude, but the ones that those otaku were rereading over and over again were thank-you notes from the girls with animal ears. For the first time, they had fought to protect someone of their own accord. Now, they were receiving thanks for their heroism.

They had at last achieved their dreams of going to a fantasy world and actually saving someone. So, they reread those letters over and over again. Soon, I learned the deeper reason… The beast girls were super sexy! *Burn in hell, nerds!*

Some salesgirls from the general store came over from the frontier to run the souvenir shops here in the capital. Cured from its corruption, it was time for the kingdom to thrive. The shops started to employ new workers from the slum quarter, secured channels for distribution with the frontier, and shifted over to being regional branches of the frontier general store. Now the general store could officially take orders from the capital, which meant that prices plummeted. Even new construction was cheaper. I had prepared an underground warehouse full of excess goods, so the store should have sufficient supply for the foreseeable future.

"Ready to go?" I asked.

"Yeah!"

We took the same road we used to get here, but this time, the atmosphere was different. The carriage traveled to the far east, to the frontier. The capital grew smaller and smaller on the horizon… *Escape*

mission, finally complete! I managed to get out of here without them taking back the Eternal Trap, and having recruited some sexy maids away from the castle. *Now that's a win-win.*

DAY 78

AFTERNOON

If the carriage doesn't shake on its own, then I'll shake it! Heavy tremors incoming!

KINGDOM OF DIORELLE

OUTSIDE THE CAPITAL

CARRIAGE TRIP. I mean, we'd ridden them plenty of times before, but this was the first time it felt like the carriages were getting truly… unleashed? In their carriages, it seemed like the nerds were getting truly worked up. Who knew what they were getting up to? *On the other hand, who cares?*

I started the carriages off slowly to let the orphans get used to it. This was their first time riding anything at all, much less taking a full journey via carriage. They were just level 1 kids. They had some stamina-boosting equipment, but I was worried about motion sickness. I had mushrooms for that, but if they got sick, they wouldn't be able to enjoy the scenery.

I looked out at the scenery for the first time myself. Wow. I literally hadn't been able to see the landscape before because of all of the high-speed travel I'd been doing! The frontier felt closed in, with its forests and steep, stony mountain ranges. Outside of the frontier, the kingdom had wide-ranging plains. There were some hills, but the land was mostly flat, so you could see incredibly far. The landscape felt like it kept going on and on, boundless outdoor wilds for some wild outdoor fun—I mean, of course not? *They're glaring at me?*

"With this much open space, it's basically an all-you-can-populate, ya know?"

Jiggle jiggle.

If people couldn't grow enough food for self-sufficiency, maybe I needed to introduce some of the frontier agricultural reforms to the

kingdom. With this much land, it seemed crazy that people could starve. *Start with potatoes, I suppose*.

The nerds had a special monopoly over the Norfolk four-course system. We still hadn't solved the fertilizer problem, but I could definitely imagine these fields covered with wheat one day. I could make the nerds teach me, but I knew that if the nerds tried to grow one thing, something totally different would end up popping out. I had to be careful. Burning whatever abominations they produced would be a real pain.

It was nice to see the land that I usually flew past. Normally it was sort of a smear of gray. I couldn't believe I had never bothered to look. The only thing I could remember was the feeling of smashing into the ground?

When Miss Armor Rep and the others used high-speed movement, they said that all they could see was a blur of green and blue. It was nice for everyone to slow down. Plus I'd done some roadwork on the way here, so we had a flat, straight line to the frontier.

This was the *Ultra Highway Orphan Star Liner*'s time to shine. I could run the carriages a hell of a lot faster than before. It was theoretically possible to make it back to the frontier in a single day. The horses had leveled up a ton from monster hit-and-runs, so they were turning into pretty gnarly beasts. The orphans seemed fine, so I decided to speed the carriages up more once they got tired of the scenery. Once it got dark, the scenery wouldn't matter anyway, so I could make the jump to full-speed while the orphans were sleeping. And Slimey was having a ball. The Poster Girl must be missing him. Or more likely, she wanted to do a dance battle. Oh god, now that Dancer Girl was around, she was sure to join her!

"Nice day, isn't it? Anyone feeling sick? If you do, just let me know."

"'Kay 'kay!"

Vice Rep B jiggled with the carriage. It was an explosive force bursting from top to bottom, side to side, with rippling impacts that only—*shoot!*

"N-no! I was just examining the suspension and shaking and vibration of the carriages! They absorb the vibrating forces so magnificently and yet still shake so majestically, a level of juicy shaking that quakes even with double wishbone suspension! So please, can everyone lower their

bows? And since when did Miss Armor Rep and Dancer Girl jump over to the other carriage? I think I might need to make an escape myself, but the sexy female knights are on this one. Ya know I've gotta wait to greet them respectfully, so, um, no ballistae on board, okay? I don't think my armor will be able to take a hit! Speaking of which, why the hell is this carriage equipped to carry ballistae in the first place?!"

(Boisterous escape and pursuit.)

The girls raged at me as we headed east to the frontier. I didn't have a compass, so by east I really just meant wherever the frontier was. East was just easier to say. Really, wherever we were going, it was on a straight road.

"I lost sight of it. Just how far did the *Accident-Waiting-to-Happen, Nerd Exclusive Super-Suspension Speed-Boosted Bubbly Bouncy Bursting Railcar* get ahead of us? I guess those horses don't know how to listen to orders. There's no controlling them! They were super cheap too. You get what you pay for, I guess? Well, there's only one way to go no matter how much they roll around on the way. They'll find their way some day. Probs."

"*You're the one who created every problem that you just listed!"* the girls shouted.

All was well. I activated the full extent of my manufacturing prowess with Wisdom for the *Luxurious Sexy Female Knight All Night's Lustful Greeting DX Special Railcar* with a magic tune-up. It could go even faster now. The current speed felt so smooth, with hardly any shaking, so I couldn't witness the marvelous generous shaking of sexy female flesh! *Next time we take a break I'll loosen the suspension.*

It was just me and the usual suspects in this car, so going smooth and easy was all well and good. But I had to admit, it would be a bit of a nice teenage-boy development for some divine force to descend and shake things up, as in shake this carriage up. What a bummer! Neither Miss Armor Rep nor Dancer Girl was wearing their armor—instead, they wore my newly developed (and truly great) tight secretary minisuits in black and charcoal, made all the more marvelous by their black stockings. I wanted to rip them off and give their smooth skin a proper greeting. But those silky stockings looked oh-so-comfortable. *Is there any way I can take us on a detour?* (Intense tremors incoming!)

Time to relax my body and soul with a dinner break. Beauteous sights awaited me even though it was dark! Teenage-boy glow outshines actual lights anyhow, so I started cooking. The two girls would probably wake up by the time I was finished. The two secretaries provided precise secretarial secret services, as scrupulous as they were slippery. It goes without saying that they secreted all over my tentacles in the cramped confines of the carriage! I got them to a whole new level of slippery today!

On the surface, eternal tentacle rain just looked like a bunch of tentacles flying through the air, but it overwhelmed their senses in a frenzied burst of rubbing and stroking. Boy, did it feel good! Damage was dealt, but it was all pleasurable damage, so they collapsed with smiles on their faces. *Better cook before the girls have time to lecture me!*

"Huh? Why are y'all blushing so much? Motion sickness, unless… By god! With cheeks that red—don't tell me you're having special feelings about the horses drawing these carriages?!"

"What?! Are you crazy! It's…it's… We're just tired, that's all!"

Whisper, whisper… "That railcar was on a one-way track to becoming an eternal tentacle pleasure zone!"

Fwump!

The girls were ready to tuck into dinner with red faces as the orphans poured out of their railcar, bursting with energy. They had spent their whole lives inside the tall walls of the capital, inside the rotting buildings of the slum quarter. It was their first time out in nature. Their first time having a picnic, evening. They were super pumped up. They had spent their lives starving in the rubble. They didn't even know the meaning of *getting pumped up*, but now they were finally able to do what kids are supposed to do. At last, we'd achieved normalcy.

"We've got asparagus-resembling vegetables that no one can identify topped with mystery-bird meatballs and unknown-bird eggs, mystery-meat hasamiyaki lotus-root roll thingamabobs, mushroom-cream croquettes, rice balls, and sandwiches. Just hang on a little longer before I can do bird teriyaki things and karaage-esque stuff? Oh, and I made french fries, so eat up?"

"Bon appetit!!!" everyone shouted.

Oh, and *now* the nerdbrains showed up? Their horses didn't listen to them, and they couldn't control the reigns, so how on earth did they manage to get over here? The meatheads were even carrying their dinner buckets.

I set up a picnic scene, but since it was dark out, the atmosphere felt lacking. Still, everyone was happily eating. Most of the kids probably were eating outside for the first time in their lives, so I wanted to come up with a picnic menu even with the lack of lighting. New flashy flavors, new flavorful memories, one frolicking Tiny Tanuki… *Yeah, can't do anything about her.* The only flashy thing about her was her stomach—*gwaaaaaargh! Mercy!*

"Just chew your food, not my head, please? You don't want to be a full-stomached Mean Girl Tanuki Biter—gah, gah, *waaagh*!!!"

She bit me! I needed to power up my headband ASAP! I got it for biting protection!

"We've never bitten you a single time!" the mean girls shouted.

"And we're not mean girls, so stop calling us that! Maybe we *should* bite you!"

Tiny Tanuki's bite hurt enough! I could only imagine my body being full of tooth-shaped punctures if the mean girls went after me too. Hickies were one thing, but tooth-shaped hickies… The desire to leave tooth-shaped hickies on someone probably revealed a lot of deep-buried psychological issues. Seriously, biting! Forget the psychological issues, that's straight-up cannibalism! Of course, if a sexy lady walked up to me and said she wanted to eat me up, I'd serve myself up on a silver platter in a heartbeat, but I didn't want to get bitten by any mean girls! They'd chomp me up and spit out my romantic dreams of getting devoured!

We took a rest after dinner and then got back on track. We couldn't see outside anymore, and after such a big meal, the orphans would probably be sleeping soundly. It was time to show off my carriages' full potential.

We should reach the frontier by morning. Yeah, this… *This is too fast!* The back wheels of the car were shooting out sparks. I needed to find some rubber, quick.

Night had fallen, and it was time to steel myself. Two particular ladies were about to get revenge on me with their piledriver, scorpion-

death-lock-level wrestling moves. I wouldn't be defeated, not today. Not on my teenage-boy head, no! I would not accept defeat on this sacred battleground! Especially since they were in bunny outfits waiting for meeeeeeee! (*Echoes resound until the morning.*)

After experimenting, I discovered that the Poisonous Gloves indeed had destructive impacts on my sex appeal. The ladies were flat on their faces, butts twitching, gasping and groaning and fading into unconsciousness as if they had been devoured from inside out. *All hail the conquering hero!*

DAY 79

MORNING

The dance battle was resolved via mysterious miming.

FRONTIER

OMUI CITY

AFTER THE KIDS WOKE UP, they disembarked from the carriage. We could see the town on the horizon over our breakfast break. Wow. We must've covered a couple hundred miles overnight.

"Ah, those gates I've longed to see…and the gatekeeper I wasn't longing to see at all. 'Sup? Are these the only two gatekeepers in the whole frontier? I don't want to get my hopes up, but I suppose that inn is still called the White Loser Inn. Yup, I knew. I mean, I was the one who made the sign?"

Complaining under his breath, Haruka-kun stopped the carriages in front of the inn. The kids piled out and stared at the fancy inn, mouths hanging open. Considering how much taller it was compared to even the king's palace, their shock was pretty understandable.

"Eyyy, commoner girl with the posters, 'sup? 'Sup? You been enjoying your civilian status? Oh, yeah, the only local specialties in the capital are I ❤ FRONTIER goods, so I'm not really sure how they would sell out here, ya know? I did bring back the best of the finest most fabulous items in massive quantities, ya feel? Speaking of which, any rumors of those gobbling goblins or crippling kobolds of frontier legends around here—ack, ack!"

Poster Girl went flying at Haruka-kun like a football, hitting him headfirst in a jumping headbutt. She knocked over the incomprehensible and inhuman sex god. It had been a while, so she'd given it her all. Tears clung to her face—she must've been lonely here.

"We're back," everyone called to her.

Jiggle jiggle!

Now it was our turn to charge, ruffling her hair one after the next, as her face slowly brightened into a grin.

"W-w-welcome back!!!" she sobbed.

We went into the inn, relaxed by the familiar surroundings. The whole class was starting to tear up. Haruka-kun was stunned by the blow. His level was still so low that even ordinary commoners could hurt him. That headbutt had a lot of force behind it!

Meanwhile, Poster Girl and Slimey were performing a mysterious dance to herald their heartwarming reunion, which Nefertiri-san joined. It was a very unusual mood. Angelica-san shook her head and sighed, but she looked happy at being back at long last.

Angelica-san's first real memories were here, after all. This is where we all got to know one another; to her, this inn was home. We split up into groups of three and five to carry our belongings to our old rooms. When we got back, the locals had laid out a celebratory *welcome home* banquet for us. We dug in as a clamor of voices debated what to do next.

The kids were also a bit petrified of the new environment, but before long, they became friends with Poster Girl and started to dance too. Really, what a bizarre-looking party! Who taught the orphans to mime like that?

The plan was to have the orphans stay at the inn for a while, and then transfer them to an orphanage in town once they got used to it. Haruka-kun said he'd build them a new place, but I didn't think it was a good idea to keep them separate from the orphaned frontier kids. We could have the kids do work and other chores in town to make pocket change, and then we'd help them find their future. Most importantly, they could all go to school together.

The new school system established by Duke Omui had opened up at the orphanage, which meant that all the local kids would be going. They'd have a lot of chances to make friends. In the end, we decided it was best for the orphans to stay at the orphanage here, although Vice Rep C was upset about being separated from them.

If we went dungeon raiding, we would only be back at night. They needed to keep busy in the meantime. We didn't want the kids to work all

day either. It would be way too dangerous to drag them along to the dungeons.

Plus, the orphanage was close to the adventurers' guild. We could always drop by—neither were far from the inn. I knew that everyone was going to be a bit lonely, but everyone agreed that this was the best decision for everyone in the long run. Even Vice Rep C didn't protest once we'd talked things through.

"Let's go say hi to everyone," I suggested. "We need to stop by the guild to get permission to raid our next dungeons anyway."

"Good idea. Should we split up?"

We needed souvenirs if we were going to greet everyone in town, but we firmly rejected the mushroom-shaped frontier pennants that Haruka-kun tried to push on us. Maidens couldn't hold pennants shaped like that! Think of appearances! The bastard who'd designed them was scheming to have some sort of mushroom-pennant race. *He needs a beating.* Angelica-san and Nefertiri-san were awake again, which meant it was lecture time.

For the first time in ages, we all walked through the city. The kids were over the moon about it. Normally, you'd expect disappointment at going from the top-of-the-line capital to a backwater frontier city. While Omui had fewer shops, the quality of products was overwhelmingly better here. In the brief time we were away, the frontier had continued developing. There were now more shops and foot traffic. The people in the streets wore smiles on their faces as they shopped and bought food. *We protected this. This is what we fought to protect.*

"Hey, it's a fried chicken stand!"

"Oh em *geee*!"

A maiden stampede was unleashed, dragging the kids along with us. We all got some pocket change from Haruka-kun, but I suspected it wouldn't last very long. Now there was a sweets factory! There was only one possible cause: the sweet red bean paste wasn't supposed to exist in this world, much less a store that sold imagawayaki bean paste pancakes. There were western-style pancakes too. We all knew Haruka-kun had to be behind that.

"Are, are, are, are… Are those *hot dogs*?!"

“Hot dogs, please!”

Compared to when food stalls first showed up in this city, this world had advanced so much. Too much. Haruka-kun was pumping modern-world knowledge into this world at a ridiculous rate, all powered by the magic spellstone industrial revolution. We couldn’t stop crying as we walked around stuffing ourselves. He just wanted to give us our old lives back and let us experience the joy of festivals. Everything we couldn’t have.

“Hang on. Is that…is that what I think it is?”

“What?! It’s ‘fried balls of mystery squishy squirmy octopus-like thing? Ya know?’ You mean…t-t-t-takoyaki?!”

There weren’t any bonito flakes or dried seaweed, but still, it was a genuine takoyaki stall. I knew how many of the girls had been keeping quiet about how badly they wanted to have these. The city streets had become a Japanese festival ground—we broke down into tears. We wailed as we shoved everything into our mouths. The kids started to worry about us. When we let them taste the food too, I saw the joy in their eyes.

This was our return to Omui… *We’re home.*

Overwhelmed with emotion and deliciousness—and completely out of money—we made it to the Adventurers’ Guild…only to find Haruka-kun still yelling about the bulletin board. Ah, that was a familiar sight. Why was he so committed to this particular bit? Seriously?

The instant Haruka-kun left the building, he got stolen away by the general store lady. Apparently, he’d arrived here before the side-jobs goods he had produced in the capital could be shipped in from the capitol. The city even had new streets, more people, everything was growing, but it still couldn’t keep up with him.

“Everything’s, like, the same, you know? In a weird way,” said Vice Rep B.

“I know what you mean.”

We were finally back, and it was still the city we knew and loved. I mean, the culprit hadn’t changed, reflected on his crimes, or learned one bit. It was time for the lecture of a lifetime!

The guild receptionist seemed happy to see us. All the people in the streets laughed seeing Haruka-kun getting dragged across the town once more.

“I’ll go get the dungeon report from the guild, so just hang out with the kids and do whatever in the meantime,” I said.

“Rager!”

Rager? Uh, don’t you mean…roger? I didn’t think it was wise to start a *rager* with the kids around, unless that rager involved someone named Roger, and it wasn’t necessarily a good idea to party with strangers either. Roger in this context is a codeword coming from the “r” in “received and understood.” Really, anything starting with R would do the trick. In fact, “Romeo” was the standard, so how did they get from R all the way to Rager again? By the way, nobody asked for this explanation to begin with, but Haruka-kun gave it anyway. Absolutely no information was received by anyone else.

“I’m so glad you’re back. We haven’t detected anything in the dungeons lately, but the monster forest is starting to repopulate.”

“The forest wants to expand again. We’ll commission Haruka-kun to restart his logging.”

The guild chief came down from his office ready to discuss business, but Haruka-kun was long gone. I was starting to see his point: he *was* popular with older men. Wherever he went, they seemed to surround him.

“Here are your permits to investigate the dungeons,” the receptionist said. “Aside from a certain non-registered individual, we’ve issued permits for your entire group. Please let me thank you for your efforts in advance.”

“Great. Here we go!”

Now we could make money. In the shallow dungeons outside of the frontier, the spellstones weren’t worth much, and we hardly found any items. The whole class hadn’t made much outside of working at the souvenir shops. The king issued us reward money, but even that was nothing compared to what we could make in dungeons. That was how strong the frontier dungeons were. *And that’s how much money we can make here!*

Since we were with Haruka-kun, the whole class could get unbelievably powerful equipment at ridiculously cheap prices. He basically had a national budget's worth of discounted weapons, each of them worth way less than they would've fetched on an open market…and we still needed to make an unbelievable amount of money to not go into ridiculous, bonfire-red debt! Two dresses each had put the entire class deep into debt, and some of the thriftier girls had lost their savings too. *We're in bad shape.*

"Let's get started first thing tomorrow!" I said.

"Let's do it!"

We needed to make enough to cover Haruka-kun's bargain sales, auctions, and dessert menus. His clothes-making ability was continuing to drastically improve—the dresses were beautiful enough to make the queens' and princesses' jaws drop. And they were very, very expensive.

DAY 79

NOON

I served a mushroom bento box to my mushroom-addict patient. It didn't cure her mushroom addiction!

OMUI CITY

ADVENTURERS' GUILD

WE FINALLY MADE IT. A day long in the making, a day that went just as I thought it would. For that reason, I needed to shout this dastardly truth to the world!

"I mean, I knew it was 100 percent inevitable as the sun rising, and an unshakeable, absolutely certainty and all that, but the commissions still haven't changed! This bulletin board defies the purpose of all bulletin boards by its eternal unchangeability! You're just determined to leave this one as-is! Rejecting the very purpose of bulletin boards until the adventurers literally rise up in revolution to overthrow this tyranny of bulletin board boringness! How can a bulletin board boycott new postings, for heaven's sake? This bulletin board needs a place to post advertisements for new posts! Ya know? Goddamn it?!" (Rant continues.)

It still hasn't changed!

"My, my. You're back, I see. And as usual, you've charged straight into the Adventurers' Guild, even though you are not an adventurer, and you've started mouthing off about the bulletin board as if you have any right to. I see now! I was looking forward to seeing how long I could hide this thing from you, but you've burst back in with a bang. It's far too early, so can you please shut your noisy mouth? These are jobs *for adventurers*!" (Rant continues.)

I finally got my fill of Miss Receptionist Rep's glares. *She's leveled up her glares with a bit of flare, I see!* Maybe she spent the time practicing? Both of us were testing the limits of our lung capacity, but that didn't make

it acceptable. Not a single commission on the bulletin board had changed! *Just you wait, bulletin board!* Who was in charge of this thing?!

As painful as it was to depart such a scene, I made to head over to the general store. I recalled getting tugged on the back of my head by the lady, who'd shoved a mountain of orders on me, so I shaved the back of my neck just in case…only to get caught in an eagle grip and get dragged there anyhow! Was she out of mushrooms and starting to suffer withdrawal symptoms? Her fingers were hurting my skull. This iron grip required some serious auto-healing on my part.

"What took you so long, damn it?" she roared. "If you're gonna go to war, get done with it faster than that! We've got a boatload of orders waiting! I thought you'd be back in two or three days!!!"

"Well, I could only finish it that fast if I just indiscriminately razed friend and foe. Thinking about it, they *were* old dudes, so I could've done that!"

I supposed we could've done a defensive war without going over to the capital at all. But a defensive war is all expenses and no profits, you know?

"And since when did you have so many salesgirls? Did they multiply?"

"I hired them!" she snapped. "Why would sales girls multiply? Do you think they're slimes or something?!"

She had sent some workers over to the capital branch, so just when I figured she'd be short on labor again, she had even more workers than before. Apparently masses of kids volunteered to work for her, grateful for the mushrooms she distributed that saved their lives. But even with eight employees, it was still animated to the point of conflagration. A fire sale inside the store!

"Just *get me clothes*, for heaven's sake! Maternity clothes! Make them! We've been waiting for restocks for ages now. The factory isn't able to keep up, so do it already!"

She had a deranged look in her eyes. The housewives must've been giving her a tough time. Yeah, the champion warrior wives who had defeated a literal dungeon Deluge. I wouldn't want to deal with them either.

“All right. I’ll use my spellstones.”

“And make it snappy!”

I went to the empty warehouses and started fabric production. I used Holding on the cloth, sent in an influx of magic power, and flattened the material into uniform strips. It was an extra step, but it made the fabrics luxury items, and harder to wrinkle as a bonus. When I started to cut and weave the fabric, the material didn’t warp either. Thanks to Wisdom, Magic Hands’ technique and precision had grown considerably. I could make a massive amount in the blink of an eye, which was sorely necessary. The incoming orders would overwhelm me if I didn’t keep up with them, so I decided to make five times as many as had been requested. Making small tweaks to the designs along the way, I threw the clothes into an ever-growing mountainous pile. I also made some shoes and bags from popular lines while I was at it.

“So you’re even faster, eh?” she said. “I’ve got the payment ready, so I’ll leave it here.”

“Oh, I got paid big bills over in the capital… Couldn’t use the cash though.”

Unfortunately none of the food stalls had been able to give me change for my 100 million ele bill.

“Make some mushroom bento in advance as well,” she said. “Ones with my name inscribed on ’em, got it? Your mushrooms are something special. Their taste is out of this world. They even healed old wounds that time wouldn’t erase. They’re top-class mushrooms, aren’t they? They’re priceless, I tell you, priceless. Thanks, kid.”

The general store lady was incredibly strong despite her long-term injuries. With those, she didn’t stand a chance on the battlefield. Still, I knew that if Murimuri Castle had fallen, she would’ve been first on the front lines, fighting without hesitation in a body that shouldn’t be capable of it. I definitely needed to get this chick healed! Plus, these mushrooms were so rare and valuable that I couldn’t sell them on the open market! Top-class items just spawned up in the frontier like…err…mushrooms? The monster forest had already started to expand in the brief time we were gone. That meant tons more mushrooms. What incredible reproductive force! An all-

you-can-pick fest meant an all-you-can-bonk feast on gobos (goblins) and kobos (kobolds).

"Hang on, hang on. I made some for the purpose of solving your acute critical mushroom addiction. It healed your wounds, but not your mushroom addiction? Then…a price of 880 ele is perfectly fine. The top of the order sheet is all mushroom bento orders, marked as 'top priority' with a seal and everything—this hasn't even made the slightest dent in your acute mushroom addiction! Mushrooms are just mushrooms! Get over it!"

I can't believe they didn't cure her!

"How much do you think those mushrooms are worth, kid? I gave one of your bento to Lady Murimour. Ever since giving birth to Lady Merielle, she's been forced to put down her sword. Thanks to your mushrooms she's been able to accompany the adventurers as a part of the defensive parties again."

Everyone refused the simple fact that these were friggin' *ordinary* mushrooms, insisting they were so incredibly valuable. I got them for *free!* There were *tons* of them in the forest! *It's goddamn overgrown with them!*

Hence all the mushroom bentos. I also falsely labeled them with *best eaten by…*stickers. That way they wouldn't try to return the bento after picking everything out except the mushrooms. Luckily, whenever someone started eating, they had finished the whole thing before they knew it. If they tried to return the box realizing what the mushrooms were, they would see the expiration date and end up eating it. Yes, the expiration date was a brilliant ploy. The girls fell for it every single day! And it was totally made up! It was boring to have to write the production date over and over again, ya know?

There was nothing better than having reserve fighting power, and Murimuri-san was over level 100. Same with the general store lady. I needed them to eat those mushrooms 'cause it was better safe than sorry. Forget simple protection from monsters—I bet no one had expected the army of the Theocracy to make it all the way to Murimuri Castle.

I needed to fortify both Murimuri Castle and our adventurers. Up until now, whenever the adventurers went monster hunting, they needed to import food, supplies, and medicine. It was a big expense. Now they could get everything they needed from the general store.

That made mushrooms infinitely more valuable than any elixir. *Don't you get it?* Even if I failed, this frontier would be my fallback. The frontier was my fortress.

More importantly…in the battle, all the housewives got some serious levels! *Yikes, this town is done for.* This was a town that could pull off a Dungeon Deluge of its own! *Be terrified of the housewives!*

"All right, that's plenty," the general store lady said. "I want to give some to my employees' families, you know. Now that they're properly working and all."

Sometimes I wondered… What exactly happened to Elf Girl? It must've been a powerful magical illness. Some kind of frontier sickness. A higher density of magic must cause all the mushrooms to grow. Those mushrooms should have been able to sustain a booming population. They *would've* if not for the monsters, which *also* ate those mushrooms. That was how the frontier turned into such a dangerous place, I figured. You had no chance fighting here without equipment or medicine.

To put things a different way, with weapons and equipment, you could reduce the damage from the monsters, heal *more* illnesses with the recovered mushrooms, get more spellstones, and solve the rest of your problems from there. With the food shortage solved, the frontier's population was increasing. The whole domain started to develop. My investments had caused the population to explode. It was an explosion that showed no signs of slowing!

That was fortunate, since I was dealing with the mysterious phenomenon of vanishing money. I had already almost blown through everything I ripped off from the Merchant Kingdom, the Theocracy, and the nobles. More theaters had been set up to show the play since we'd left the frontier. I figured that would give me some leeway, but I was already out of cash on-hand.

"I guess that's what the frontier is really about," I sighed. "Dungeons."

Truthfully, the best sources of income for me were dungeons and then ripping off the girls after visiting said dungeons. I had set up profiteering in the capital without those two pillars. With the girls running out of money altogether, I had to prop them up with an allowance. But here, the sweets

factory was running, lots of food stalls had popped up all over, and the orphans had run through their own allowances. I gave them more, only to see them in line for manju right alongside my classmates. *This is gonna be the rebirth of the one-more-set exercise special, isn't it?*

Just now I saw them all weeping as they gorged on cotton candy. I guess that was happiness for ya, but it was stretching my budget to the limit. Ya feel?

What else? The armory dude seemed to have spare time. I guess you lose customers if you give everyone free weapons just because there's an "invasion" or whatever. He was out of stock too. *I knew he wasn't suited to being a businessman!*

"'Sup, been a second. I see nothing's changed 'cause you're still bald and bearded and old… Having a ball(d)?"

"Bald, not ball. So you're finally back. Good work. You saved everyone. Thank you."

The old dude had made sure everyone in the defense of Murimuri Castle—from the adventurers to the village guards to the city troops—had top-class equipment. Not a single soul died in the battle. No amount of healing mushrooms could bring someone back to life, after all. Only armor, a sword, a spear, or other such equipment could save your life on the battlefield. The frontier had saved itself. That was why he had no customers. Everyone was already fully equipped!

For now, I sold him the equipment from the kingdom treasury with all the *meh* effects. Oh, and all of the gold and miscellaneous gear I picked up from the nobles' properties. In the end, I made a killing on some trash I'd scooped off the ground. Every sale helped, and soon enough I had a small nest egg to sit on.

All the stores had done crazy business and were out of stock. Once they had stock back, the customers would return. For the armory, we just had to hope that people would want to upgrade for better stuff even though they already had full sets of equipment. The general store and armory alike had distributed their goods across the frontier, so both had empty shelves. *What a mess.*

I borrowed the forge from him for a bit. Before, I had been able to produce weapons in numbers, but not the quality I was looking for. So I went all out on a forging, smelting, quenching, hardening, polishing spree. Perceiving with Jupiter Eye, feeling with Holding, comprehending with Wisdom, and doing the labor with Magic Hands. With all of that power, I could follow my instincts. When I did…at last, everything seemed to fall in the place. *I did it.*

This was my best weapon so far: "Severing Blade: Power, Speed, Dexterity +40%. Sword mastery adjustment (large). Physical defense nullifying. Severing. +ATT."

Next up, a spear and a shield. If I could practice mass production at this level and power everything up with mithril, I'd be able to upgrade everyone's equipment. One hundred pieces should be enough, including spares. But my one go at this sword had exhausted all of my MP. This sword was too powerful to put on the market; it'd be deadly in the hands of an enemy.

"That's quite a sword you've made there," the bald dude said. "You're a top-class smith, that's for certain. Better than top class, I gotta admit. There's a saying among blacksmiths. 'Even with skill, you can't learn the *feel*.' But you've got it. If you can make something like that, you're a true first-rate smith."

Blacksmith-approved, huh? The bald, bearded dude was the best smith in the kingdom, and he gave me his stamp of approval. That meant that with some additional endowed effects and a mithril power-up, it'd be a true masterpiece.

We got lucky this time, that's all. Nobody died. Yes, everyone made it, but in the end, it was all down to luck. We just needed a way to make sure luck was always on our side. When our luck ran out—that was when we were truly done for. *That's why we need something that allows us to hope—allows us the chance to make it through.*

I was determined to create something stronger than destiny. I had way surpassed my own personal limits. At this point, the stronger I got, the frailer I got. My abilities were too far beyond my stats.

"Yeah, makes sense. I'm looking for skills so powerful they hid themselves from me to prevent them from killing me, and then I'm

combining and twisting them into whole new shapes. But c'mon, skills, don't *lie* to me! Don't hide, damn it!"

If I couldn't level up as fast as my skills, I'd eventually crumble. I knew that, I knew all that…and I was still surpassing my safe limits way faster than I'd expected. Why did it feel like only Sex God was safe and easy to use?! I wasn't even approaching the limits of that. *Let's try to get a little closer tonight!*

◆

AFTERWORD

◆

THANKS TO YOU GREAT READERS, we've arrived at the afterword of Volume 7. Thank you so much. And, well, you know the rest.

Yup. I banged my head against the page limit. I ruthlessly shaved the manuscript down, revised it, and cut it down further. I just barely managed to squeeze everything in…and after all that, I sent the manuscript off to my editor Y-san with a "Two pages over the limit, suck it. :P"

Thank the heavens it ended with that!

The kingdom arc has come to an end at long last. We got cut off midway through the action in Volume 6, so I was high-key-slash-low-key concerned that it was a bad way to end that volume. But now, we've wrapped things up in Volume 7.

After managing to neatly end Volumes 1 and 2 with a ~*FIN*~ at the end, those ~*FIN*~s got mercilessly cut. Volume 3 just ended straight-up in the middle of the action, but at last, I have my—*wait a second, did my editor erase my* ~FIN~ *again?!*

With a bit (read: a lot) of this and that, the long arc (throw the volumes together and we're approaching tome-territory) finally came to a denouement. But with more coming, I'm going to find it more and more difficult to actually end this story. (Starts sweating.)

I'd like to offer my customary apologies. After cramming in more than a dozen chapters, I felt like I needed to add more. Then a few chapters later, I realized I needed a prologue as well, so I needed to cut the story down, and then I needed to do additional revisions…only to realize I was two chapters over the limit. Even after all that cramming, Y-san *still* gave me a two-page epilogue out of the bottomless kindness and generosity of their heart!

I must extend similar thanks to Saku Enomaru-sensei for their wonderful drawings. Also, I have additional thanks to the manga artist, Bibi-sensei. The original web comic doesn't have any direction for drawings, much less illustration drafts. I'm really sorry. Fortunately, leaving everything to them worked out far better than I could've ever imagined! Thank you, thank you!

Also, thank you to everyone who is reading this now. I finally managed to finish the kingdom arc, and that's only thanks to all of you.

Lastly, I offer my deep gratitude to all of the bookstores out there for stocking my books, and even going so far as to post pictures on Twitter… Thank you so much.

I mean, normally you'd need a bestseller to hit seven volumes, right? And this is certainly *not* a bestseller. Still, we've managed to sneak up on seven volumes from the shadows. This may be a niche story, but it means the world to me that you've taken a liking to it.

—SHOJI GOJI

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